

THE ACTS
OF THE APOSTLES
IN PRESENT-DAY PREACHING

HALFORD E. LUCCOCK

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THE ACTS
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THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES IN PRESENT-DAY PREACH-
ING

THE ACTS
OF THE APOSTLES
IN PRESENT-DAY PREACHING

ONE VOLUME EDITION

by

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THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

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FOREWORD

“ I love preliminary things —
The tuning up of flutes and strings,
The little scrolls musicians play,
The varying keys to feel their way,
The hum — the hush in which it dies,
But most to see the curtain rise.”

The Book of Acts is one of the most fascinating “ preliminary things ” in all history. In it we hear great music feeling its way; we see the curtain rise on a stirring drama. No one could read the Book of Acts with any close attention today without being freshly struck by its many suggestive and provocative parallels to current issues and experiences. There is no need to read back into the record the terms of contemporary problems. Indeed, that is the very thing which should be vigilantly guarded against in any honest use of the Bible. Yet, let the guard be as alert and rigorous as possible, out of the record itself there leap startling relationships between the first century and the twentieth.

Both periods are marked by change, disintegration and creation. A sense of

“ Effort and expectation and desire
And something ever more about to be ”

pervades both the Book of Acts and our own time. The overshadowing figure of Caesar, the conflict of ideas contending for the allegiance of men, the crumbling of moral standards, the opposition which the heralds of the Good News met — all these supply arresting and disturbing parallels.

The present volume might have been called, “ Notebook

on the Acts." It is neither a commentary nor a volume of sermons on the Book of Acts. It is an unsystematic and unpretentious collection of thoughts provoked by interested reading of Acts in the light of contemporary situations. It is particularly concerned with parallels between the history recorded in Acts and the present day.

Professor C. Harold Dodd, of Cambridge University, in his inaugural address in the chair of divinity there in 1936 made a vigorous plea for the place of the drawing of parallels in New Testament study. "The present task," he said, "is to grasp the whole first century gospel in its temporary, historical and actual reality, and then to make the bold and even perilous attempt to translate the whole into contemporary terms."

This book, then, is an attempt at a "perilous" business, that of translating some of the history in Acts into contemporary terms and parallels. Such a venture must necessarily steer a narrow course between rocks on either side of the channel. On the one hand, there is the great and constant danger of violently reading back into the record what simply is not there — the ideas, the language, the thought-forms, and the problems of a later day. On the other hand, there is fear to translate into contemporary terms, a fear which may cause us to miss the largest usefulness of the New Testament, its permanent meaning for thought and action.

I am not under any delusion that I have been successful in steering between Scylla and Charybdis; but it has been an exciting trip; and I hope there may be some suggestiveness and stimulation for thinking in the notes of the journey.

The text used throughout is that of the American Revised Version. My indebtedness to scholars who have written on Acts and the period will be constantly evident. I wish to make particular record of gratitude for *The Beginnings of Christianity*, edited by F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp

Lake, especially Volume IV of that great work, the Translation and Commentary by Kirsopp Lake and Henry J. Cadbury.

I am grateful also to my wife, who typed the manuscript and accomplished the more difficult task of translating hieroglyphic handwriting into English.

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THE ACTS
OF THE APOSTLES
VOLUME I

EXTRA!

The former treatise. ACTS 1:1

Here is Volume Two made necessary before Volume One really gets into circulation. Even before "the former treatise" has been properly proofread the heralds of the news race down the streets of the Roman and Grecian world: "Extra! Extra! New developments in the case of Jesus!"

The Christian message must always take on some of the qualities of a newspaper. The evangel is literally new every morning, with the authentic additions of yesterday's experience and history. All through history there has been the conflict between the Files and Today's Edition. It is not an exaggeration to say that two guilds have been at work in the Christian church, the embalmers and the creators. The embalmers are those who feel that all wisdom and history worth noting are entombed in the back files of yesterday. The creators are those who think of their religion as a living, flowing, dynamic, many-sided experience. In their conception, any "former treatise" is always fulfilled in a new "extra."

So the Christian gospel must today be cried out—in the streets of Berlin, Rome, Madrid, Chicago, Detroit, on the battlefields of steel and coal—as "stop-the-press" news concerning the impact of the truth of Jesus, "the same yesterday, today and forever," on the changing life and experience of men. Strickland Gilliland has well expressed this in a line of one of his poems which declares that "God kept on talking when his book had gone to press."

The tragedy of conceiving our religion as a closed book is well, though unintentionally, pictured in a religious newspaper's report of a sunrise Easter service: "Easter dawn service began at five-thirty and was over just after the dawn." Too

many Christian undertakings have been “over just after the dawn,” prematurely embalmed in the back files. A far truer picture of our religious records is the description which Edmund Wilson gives of the impression made on him by Michelet’s *History of France*. He writes: “There is no book which makes us feel when we have finished it that we have lived through and known with such intimacy so many generations of men. And it makes us feel something more: that we ourselves are the last chapter of the story, and that the next chapter is for us to create.”¹

We are the latest chapter in a continued story!

THE ULTIMATE TEST

*Speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God,
and being assembled together with them.* ACTS 1:3

“Speaking concerning the kingdom” — that is often so easy. “Being assembled together with them” (“eating with them,” as the Revised Version margin has it, or “lodging with them,” as Moffatt translates it) — that is often so hard.

This compact reference to Jesus’ association with the disciples after his resurrection indicates two of the means of his ministry: speaking and lodging. Speaking in itself is incomplete; the message must be made real in daily living and become a part of the minds and lives of people, else it is futile, a mere spraying of the solar system with words.

The familiar religious symbol of the elevated pulpit, so true as a figure of the elevation and authority of the word of God, has its terrible drawbacks. It may symbolize something other than elevation — remoteness, absence of the shoulder-to-shoulder rub of experience, failure to be “assembled” with

the human family to whom and for whom the speaking is done.

Today there is much speaking about the kingdom. But how much more “lodging” needs to be done—how much more sharing of experience, feeling of the hurts that cut into the bodies and souls of exploited people! A sharp and memorable picture, in the vernacular of the street, of the difficulty of “being assembled” with a harrassed group, is presented in Waring Cuney’s verses, “You Want to Know What It’s Like Being Colored?”

“ Well,
It’s like going to bat
With two strikes
Already called on you —
It’s like playing pool
With your name
Written on the eight ball.
Did you ever say
‘Thank you, sir,’
For an umbrella full of holes?
Did you ever dream
You had a million bucks,
And wake up with nothing to pawn?
You want to know what it’s like
Being colored? —
Well,
The only way to know
Is to be born that way.”²

Of course, the only way actually to know is “to be born that way.” But tremendous growth in the redemptive spirit can be achieved through “being assembled” with people, so that we can look out on life with their eyes and feel with their nerves.

POINTS OF DEPARTURE

All that Jesus began to do. ACTS 1:1

In reading the New Testament, one of the points on which eternal vigilance is necessary is the danger of reading too much into the tense of a verb or some other detail of grammar. The Bible has suffered enormously from the application of the rabbit trick to exegesis. Times without number a scholar with a tall silk hat and an air of solemn mystery has surreptitiously stuffed doctrinal rabbits into the hat and then pulled them out amid awe-struck wonder. Generations of intensive word studies have drawn out of the New Testament, by a specious grammatical legerdemain, things that never were on sea or land.

A first necessity in dealing with the words of Scripture is an honest reverence for them, a stern and disciplined refusal to lay upon them any burden other than that which they legitimately bear. Take this passage for instance — “all that Jesus began to do”: one could read into these words meanings and implications which were quite foreign to the author’s mind and intention. The words are a simple statement of fact.

When, however, forswearing any grammatical hocus-pocus with the tense, we look at the words in historical perspective, from the standpoint of what has happened in Christian history, they give us a picture of real significance. Weymouth catches it in his translation: “All that Jesus did, as a *beginning*.” Christianity is a point of departure as well as a point of arrival. The acts and words of Jesus are a beginning, a center from which to journey.

Of course Christian faith is also a destination, a point of arrival. In a high sense it is the end of hazardous and exciting journeys — from fear to assurance, from shipwreck to

harbor, from being lost to salvation. "Lead, kindly light," is a permanent prayer of humanity. Yet there has been too much of "Pilgrim's progress" in Christian history. Too exclusively has faith been a destination, a place of arrival. When so conceived there is always an element of mere escape in it, escape from Vanity Fair, from the Valley of Humiliation or from Giant Despair. Too often has the City of Destruction been viewed as the only possible point of departure. We should remember that the Celestial City is also a starting point. To every great affirmation of faith and experience there is appended the question, "Where do we go from here?" All that Jesus did, "*as a beginning.*"

Ernest Poole has enshrined this truth in a memorable picture. He describes a little boy who from his home on Brooklyn Heights loved to watch the outgoing ships. One day he heard Henry Ward Beecher preach on a harbor as a place of refuge into which storm-tossed ships put for safety. "You big chump," he said to Mr. Beecher, in violent dissent.

"For what was this he was saying? Something about 'the harbor of life.' The harbor! In an instant I was listening hard; for this was something I knew about. 'Safe in the harbor,' I heard him say; 'Home to the harbor at last to rest.' And then, when he passed on to something else I didn't know about, I settled disgustedly back in the pew.

"'You chump,' I thought contemptuously. To hear him talk, you would have thought the harbor was a place to snuggle down in, a nice little place to come home to at night. 'I guess he has never seen it much,' I snorted.

"And though all the years since then have been for me one long story of a harbor, restless, heaving, changing, always changing — it has never changed for me in this — it has never seemed a harbor where ships come to dock, *but always a place from which ships start out* — into the storms and the fogs of the seas."³

In our contemporary world the acts and words of Jesus are a beginning, a point of departure. Take one crucial issue in our world, that of war and peace. Professor Schuman of the University of Chicago, who recently made a survey of the prospects of peace, declares that "No Thoroughfare" signs block all the avenues purporting to lead to peace. There is no road to peace from Wall street, none from Moscow, none from Geneva. In the midst of that realistic gloom one inevitably asks, "Why not try another place as a starting point?" Why not try the road which starts from Jerusalem and a green hill beyond its walls?

THE ARISTOCRACY OF THE ATTENTIVE

To whom he also showed himself. ACTS 1:3

To whom? To his friends, of course. How could it be otherwise? Great revelations come only to the attentive. They are given to a chosen aristocracy, but it is a self-chosen one, which has made itself capable of receiving revelation by sustained attention to a particular field and particular data of truth. The great revelations of science, for instance, have come to those who have given themselves utterly to observation of nature. Epoch-making insights have followed periods of costly attention and incubation. There is a fascinating description of this process in Graham Wallis' book, *The Art of Thought*, in the chapter entitled, "Stages of Control." The four stages of scientific discovery are there outlined: study of a problem, unconscious incubation, the emergence of the solution, and the verification by experiment. In the intellectual world it is profoundly true that a rolling stone gathers no moss.

These words record that Jesus showed himself to those who were his friends, who had been attentive to him. The assurance of religion comes to the aristocracy of the attentive, to

those who have exposed their minds and the secret places of their hearts to the data of religion as a photographic plate is exposed to a view. And it may well be added that we ought not to allow ourselves to be browbeaten by scientific bullies who swing clubs and tell us that religious experience is an illusion, because it cannot be proved by astronomy, chemistry or psychology. Such a person is exactly like a man trying to get the flower show on the radio. Color and perfume are a bit beyond the range of that instrument, no matter how many tubes it may have. The color and perfume of religious experience are beyond capture by quantitative measurement. To the great undertaking of learning to know God, whom to know aright is life eternal, we must bring not only the instruments we use in learning to know friends — observation and information — but also intuition, faith, sympathy, experiment and discovery.

In her story of the Pre-Raphaelite painters, *Poor Splendid Wings*, Frances Winwar relates an incident from the life of Holman Hunt which illuminates the revelation of Jesus to the attentive. Hunt worked for the greater part of three years on his painting, "The Light of the World," and in order to get the perfect shading of light and color for the portrait of Jesus he always worked out of doors and at night, painting by the light of a candle, his feet wrapped in straw to keep them warm. Three years of attention!

Jesus shows himself only to those who are attentive to him, attentive to his major concerns and highest values, the things that to him were supreme. It is inevitable that to the inattentive Jesus becomes a blank, a mist. A striking confirmation of this, from the very stuff of experience, is found in a letter written by Edmund Gosse in his seventy-fifth year. Replying to a friend's letter, he writes: "You speak of the peace which the years bring. But they bring no peace for me. Life is pleasant, but I am not without terror sometimes at the idea of this sensual sufficiency in life coming to an end. I have

no idea how the spiritual world would look to me, for I have never glanced at it since I was a child."

Edmund Gosse was not among those to whom Jesus showed himself.

WHEN JESUS "COMES ALIVE"

He showed himself alive. ACTS 1:3

Has Jesus ever "come alive" for you? Have you ever experienced the moment pictured in the old Greek myth of Galatea where the statue comes to life and steps down from the pedestal and becomes a living person? The church perversely spent centuries in putting Jesus on a remote pedestal. Now it takes still more centuries to lift him from it and allow him to live.

A young woman visiting the battlefield of Gettysburg said in surprise, "This is the first time in my life that I ever realized that the Civil War was not just reading matter." That is what the New Testament has been to multitudes — just reading matter!

How can we find communion with Jesus, so that our very lives may be a convincing reply to Middleton Murry's dictum that "God is only a metaphor, without significance to the modern mind"?

There are many ways in which Jesus "comes alive" to a person. But the one most likely to be overlooked is that sure way which is described in New Testament language as "the fellowship of his sufferings." That fellowship is the holiest communion service, the communion of purpose, of sympathy, of sacrificial spending of life. When we respond to his invitation, "Follow me," when we partake of his love, his struggle, Jesus comes out of the shadow, alive.

“ BULLETINS ALL DAY ”

By many proofs. ACTS 1:3

Here's a tough word for this generation — proofs! It is hard for us to think ourselves back to the first Christian generation and realize what an utterly different thing “ proof ” meant to the mind of that age. In so many fields, what passed for proof to the world of Greek, Roman and Hebrew is for our time merely interesting legend or myth whose natural history can be traced in detail and related to similar luxuriant growths all the way from Tasmania to the Congo.

Even within the lifetime of those now living there has been a vast change in attitude toward what the Authorized Version calls the “ many infallible proofs ” of the resurrection of Jesus. The very word “ infallible ” has become an antique. The word “ proof ” as applied to immortality has a slightly impertinent sound to it. It suggests the wrangles of a courtroom, rousing only faint interest and no conviction.

Yet that word “ proof ” cannot be outlawed from real religion. The only proofs which carry conviction to most minds today are of a sort different from those of the courtroom and rest on different foundations. They move in the world of daily experience. They arise from one's whole conception of the values of life. The general nature of the “ many proofs ” of immortality may very well be indicated in the words of Emily Dickinson:

“ The only news to me
Is bulletins all day
From Immortality.”

“ Bulletins all day ” of the worth of life, of experienced values which carry an overtone of the reasonableness, indeed of the inevitability, of immortality. “ Oh, we're sunk

enough here, God knows." Yet along the common highways there is greatness passing by. We have seen it and heard the daily bulletins it sends. The fruits of the spirit of love — joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control — these are not hothouse products, rare as orchids. They grow in the open in all seasons, in the plainest of back yards. They are persuasive bulletins of an unseen, enduring spiritual reality in which they have their source.

STICK TO YOUR BASE

He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem.

ACTS 1:4

Even though we do not attempt to plumb the meaning of all that might have been implied in this direction to the disciples not to leave Jerusalem, we can easily see certain definite results which came from their staying together. One great result was the growth of a new fellowship. During those days in Jerusalem there was created something utterly new in history, the bond of Christian fellowship. It was a history-making force. Christianity conquered in the world of the first century not alone through its ideas; it won its way also through the warmth, the strength, the reality of its fellowship. Indeed, men were often attracted to the fellowship and became a part of it long before they had any understanding of the ideas of Christianity. Again and again in the Book of Acts we come across groups of people who had only a very real experience of the new fellowship and life of the Christian community.

The historical process was simple enough. The time of waiting together at Jerusalem furnished the basis on which the whole far-ranging Christian fellowship could be built.

Here was something actual and concrete, this particular human network, with a new solidarity built upon relationships growing from tenuous threads into strong cords. There was great wisdom — call it divine strategy if you wish — in the disciples' staying together till the vast undertaking had a solid basis in achieved concrete experience.

There is a dateless, eternal wisdom in sticking to the base of concrete experience in every great plan and project. When that basis is forgotten or but dimly perceived, the whole effort is likely to dissolve into mist. It may go up into the stratosphere of thin generality, or off to the horizon of the remote. Of course, there is plenty of horizon-blue in the Book of Acts. But the thrust out to the horizon had carrying power because it started from actual and particular experience. This saving quality of the concrete beginning is so often lost because the concrete beginning is hard to make. It seems tame when compared to the glamour of the distant and undefined.

George Fox records a vision in language which takes on a New Testament quality. "From this hill," he writes, "the Lord let me see in what places he had a great people to be gathered. . . . He let me see a great people in white raiment by a riverside coming to the Lord, and the place where I saw them was about Wensleydale and Sedbergh." What an anticlimax! Small, prosaic villages which were the actual setting of Fox's life. An unlikely place for crowds in white raiment!

Yet there is a sure New Testament insight here in that the vision is set in a concrete and familiar place. Here in front of you, here at your feet, is the place to begin, if any effective beginning is to be made. There is in Christian terms no climax except in the concrete. "God so loved the world" — that great affirmation came to a climax in an actual cross on a particular day.

Bliss Perry writes of the Puritans that some of them were so "spiritual" that they had to hold on hard to the huckleberry bushes to keep from being translated. It is an amusing

picture but it contains a core of solemn truth. Huckleberry bushes of concrete attachment to the ground of particular experience are an indispensable means of being saved from evaporation into grandiose and futile generalities. Take the spheres of international and racial relations, for instance: it is so much easier to cry out rapturously with Schiller, "O ye millions, we embrace you," than to act in the exact terms of some real situation. In the labor movement of the present day, the generalities about justice and brotherhood evaporate into a mist unless they root in concrete action toward gaining greater power for labor.

There are two things about this waiting in the Jerusalem of concrete experience which must be remembered:

It stirs up trouble.

It also stirs up power.

POWER FOR A TASK

Ye shall receive power. ACTS 1:8

We cannot be reminded too often that pentecostal power came to the disciples when they faced the pentecostal task. During the days of waiting together in Jerusalem, considering their own course, they inevitably asked the question later asked by the audience on the day of Pentecost, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Together the two growths went on — a consciousness of the task they were to do as Jesus' disciples, and an experience of power in preparation for that task.

This has as sharp a meaning for the twentieth century as for the first. We witness an endless series of ecclesiastical campaigns for a "revival of religion" or an "increase of spiritual power." They are on the wrong track. Power is never achieved when pursued for itself. In the divine economy, as

we have glimpses of it in the Bible, power always goes with a commission. It came to the disciples at Pentecost; it comes to anyone whenever he squarely faces an undertaking. Churches pray often and vehemently, "O Lord, give us power," and forget that an essential part of the answer is in their own hands. That answer is to tackle something definite for which they need power. Many churches are gasping away "at this poor dying rate" which never tackle anything more inspiring than balancing the budget. They show little more of outreaching spiritual passion than would be found in an Elks Club.

I am reminded here of an inspired "boner" made in a quiz on hygiene in a Boston school: "The person working out of doors can digest his food, but one leading a secondary life cannot." True indeed! A "secondary" life — life at second hand — in religion makes impossible the assimilation of food or the generation of force.

Look out on the world from the windows of an upper room. See where God's holy war is being waged. Engage in it. Then the annual Pentecost day will mean something more than a faded anniversary. Dr. Paul E. Sherer has sounded a ringing warning to "anniversary Christians." He says, "We Christians seem to have developed a kind of memorial complex. . . . All some of us can manage is a pleasant historical mood. I grow just a bit weary of anniversaries. Religion is like marriage in this: it can fall away until it becomes little more than a celebration of anniversaries. It never seems to occur to some couples that they could do more than just remember that they were happy once. It isn't necessary every year to refer the matter of your wedded bliss to a committee on antiquities. Is Pentecost just a subject for research or can it occur again?"

If we face the pentecostal task in this desperate world we shall receive power, and for more than another research.

DANGER — EXPLOSIVES!

*Ye shall be my witnesses . . . unto the uttermost
parts of the earth.* ACTS 1:8

Did Jesus ever command his disciples in the very words, "Go ye into all the world"? The most pertinent answer to that question is, "It doesn't make any difference."

There are grave historical and exegetical problems concerning the great commission. Lake and Cadbury say in their commentary on Acts, "This passage is the Lucan form of the Matthaean universal commission, 'Go into all the world and make disciples of all the Gentiles.' Both passages reflect the tendency to give the authority of Jesus to practices which the disciples were in reality driven to adopt only by stress of later circumstances. . . . If Jesus really commanded the apostles to preach to the Gentiles, would they have been so reluctant as Acts 6-15 proves that they were?"⁴

The key words here seem to be, "driven . . . by the stress of later circumstances." The universality of the Christian message has the authority of experience. Experience showed the apostles that in their message they had something explosive. It "could not be holden" by any arbitrary boundaries of geography, race or nation. The gospel exploded and quite literally came down all over the landscape. That spiritual explosion told the apostles something about the quality of their material. The first great enemies of essential Christianity were those religious provincials, the Judaizers, who thought

"The rustic cackle of their burg
The murmur of the world."

A minister recently sent a number of books, among them a copy of the New Testament, to be rebound. He was sur-

prised on the return of the books to find on the shelfback of the New Testament a label in gilt letters, "T.N.T." There was no room to spell out "The New Testament," so the bookbinder inscribed merely the first letters of the three words, "T.N.T."

Not a bad name for the New Testament! It *is* T.N.T. It explodes, and pieces come down in unexpected places. We are told nowadays by cautious souls that nowhere in the Bible is there a text reading, "Go ye into all the C.I.O. strikes and preach the gospel," or "Go ye into all diplomatic conferences and preach the gospel." That is, of course, true. Nevertheless, when the great truths of Jesus' message are spread abroad they explode and come down in the midst of industrial conflicts and suave political preparations for war.

In aviation effective use is made of a device known as an "artificial horizon" as an aid in landing in a fog. There is a tragic suggestion in the words, for the gospel has been imprisoned by painfully artificial horizons—not the divine horizon of human need, but the man-made horizon of borders or breed or birth or class interest. The great commission to go into every corner of the world's life is inherent in the dangerous, explosive nature of the truth itself.

CONSIDER THE PEBBLE

Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.
ACTS 1:8

The little pebble has never been used as a religious symbol. Yet when we consider this classic picture of widening Christian influence, we feel that the pebble dropped into the water and causing ever enlarging circles to travel outward, is worthy

of a place beside other Christian symbols, such as the eagle and the cross.

What Christianity most needs in our day is not geographical expansion, as in this first Christian generation, but expansion into different realms of life. The widening circle is to enclose not merely Judea and Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth, but areas of life as yet unclaimed for Christianity — social, industrial, political areas.

We dare not forget, however, that first urgency for geographical and numerical expansion. It is a permanent compulsion laid on the heart and mind of the church. When that compulsion is relaxed, creeping paralysis sets in.

A few years ago when Mrs. Sara King Iselin, a "social arbiter" of New York and Newport, died, an Associated Press dispatch carried this paragraph: "She was known as the most exclusive of 'the great ladies of the city.' No new names had been added to her invitation list in twenty-five years."

No new names in twenty-five years! There is a Mount Everest of achievement in rigid exclusiveness! Yet that perfection of complacent aplomb has been almost reached by many a church. There have been no pebbles, no widening circles, no agitated movements from Judea to Samaria, to the ends of the earth, in the life of too many churches. They sit like "great ladies" in musty parlors, awaiting *rigor mortis*. Over them might be written as an epitaph something like the estimate which Professor Gilbert Chinard makes of John Adams: "In his patriotism, deep and sincere, there was no trace of the missionary spirit. His horizon was much narrower and his vision did not transcend the present."⁵

The circle of Christian agitation and movement is destined to reach every realm of human experience. The ocean of life lies before us. "There gloom the dark, broad seas." A striking picture of the effect of Jesus' message is suggested

by the English scholar, Richard Sunne, who writes concerning Shakespeare, "He forced on the world the making of a new kind of criticism." That is what the advent of Christian standards of value has done historically. When Jesus is taken into the jungles of our world, he will again compel the making of a new kind of criticism.

THE OBSCURED JESUS

A cloud received him out of their sight. ACTS 1:9

The details of this story of the ascension of Jesus do not fit into present conceptions of the physical universe. They are naturally and inevitably geared to the thought-world of their time. But taken merely as a picture for the imagination to ponder on, this bit of narrative has quickening and disturbing suggestions. The major disasters of Christian history may be accurately summed up as having been due to Jesus' being obscured by a cloud which removed him from men's clear sight. Again and again has his face been obscured in a mist so dense and complete that multitudes within the church could repeat with tragic truthfulness the words of Peter in his denial of Jesus, "I never knew the man."

Clouds of incense have obscured Jesus. In his own sanctuary he has been enveloped in clouds of worship. Dr. Fosdick has done a needed and courageous service in stressing the perils of worshiping Jesus in his forthright sermon on that subject. This opaque incense has hidden from us the Jesus of Whittier's hymn:

" But warm, sweet, tender, even yet
A present help is he."

There is a strange irony in the fact that the extreme formal deification of Jesus has very often had the same effect on hu-

man life as the extreme denial of him. For both remove him from daily life. The sonorous, nebulous phrases of the Nicene creed, "Very God of very God, begotten, not created," may have just the same effect as the dismal requiem of Matthew Arnold:

" Now he is dead. Far hence he lies
In the lone Syrian town,
And on his grave with shining eyes
The Syrian stars look down."

The Master of men is enveloped in a cloud so thick that he cannot be seen in his close and redeeming relationship to the men and women for whom he died; nor can his light penetrate to humanity — the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, wherein crushed and exploited men, women and children may be clearly seen as sons and daughters of Almighty God.

Clouds of words have enveloped Jesus, removing him from men's sight. A dictionary can make a cloud denser than any in nature. The real Jesus has been screened by dictionaries, by jargons philosophical, theological and sentimental. Logan Pearsall Smith, in his little book on Shakespeare, describes an interest which has a sharp pertinence to religion. He writes: "I find it an interest in life — perhaps the greatest of my interests, and one which, as I grow older, grows both in intensity and in my power to satisfy it — *to provide my mind with meanings to attach to names.*"⁶ How could we better describe a central task of our day than by saying that it is "to provide the mind with meanings" to attach to the name of Jesus?

Religion has suffered greatly from the tendency of its great words to become what Van Wyck Brooks calls "dummy words" — those which "allow the mind to go around and around in a large sort of way without involving the difficult

intellectual act of clinching something.” Atonement, salvation, love — these are examples of religious words liable to become dummies, with their content dissipated into fog.

In contrast to this Jesus, however, is the Jesus who escapes from the clouds. The sunrise days of history have been those of a new discovery of Jesus. A rift in the clouds comes and Jesus stands clear. He emerges from the clouds in the fresh view of a Luther, a Wesley, a Rauschenbusch. The greatest hope for tomorrow is the assurance, based on history, that with the discovery of new problems and perils there will also be a new discovery of Jesus.

THE ROYAL MILE

Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is nigh unto Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey.

ACTS I:12

This journey was a little over half a mile. Lake and Cadbury note: “The rabbinical law of a journey on the Sabbath was based on Exodus 16:29, ‘abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the Sabbath day,’ interpreted by Numbers 35:5, which defines the suburbs of cities of the Levites as 2000 cubits measured from the city walls in every direction. Thus 2000 cubits or 6 stadia outside a town was a Sabbath day's journey. This is little more than half a mile.”⁷

Thus according to the record in Acts, when the disciples returned from the ascension of Jesus to take up life again in Jerusalem, it was a short walk physically. But in its implications it was a long and momentous journey — a journey many people never take.

In Edinburgh, Scotland, there is a street rich in historic

memories, running down from the Castle to Holyrood palace. It is called the "Royal Mile" from the many royal processions which have passed along it, going from the castle on the hill to the palace below. That street, about a mile in length, stirs the imagination because of its associations not only with secular royalty but with men like John Knox.

"The Royal Mile" is a name which with profound fitness may be applied to this road from Olivet to Jerusalem. Consider some of the real meanings of the journey from that starting point to that destination.

It was a journey from vision to deed. Out on the hilltop of Olivet there was the vision in the sky. Back in the city, less than a mile away, lay the place and the task of giving the vision meaning through action. It is always a royal mile when anyone travels from vision to deed.

It was a journey from the passive voice to the active voice. The standard New Testament grammar has well over a thousand pages closely printed in small type. But a chief point of New Testament grammar can be stated in one short, simple sentence: Spiritual life begins in the passive voice, but it is never completed until it gets into the active voice.

It was a journey from the abstract to the concrete. That journey, in whatever realm of life it is taken, is always a royal progress. The poet Thomas Gray has left a frank record of his difficulties along that rough road to the concrete: "As to humanity, you know my aversion to it; which is barbarous and inhuman, but I cannot help it."⁸ What a chasm between that confessed "aversion" and the high celebration of humanity in the "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"! Yet how often that mile from easy and pleasant abstraction to rough concreteness is an untraveled road!

It was a journey from privilege to need. Olivet was a height of fellowship. Down in the crowded streets of Jerusalem, in their squalor and darkness, there was the same pano-

rama of stark need, physical and spiritual, which every great city always presents, be it in A.D. 31 or in A.D. 1938. Many people have traveled a hundred thousand miles who never once have known the incomparable experience of going this pathway. The city of God is always to be found at the end of a royal mile.

HOW FAR CAN YOU TRAVEL ON SUNDAY?

A Sabbath day's journey. ACTS 1:12

Let this phrase sink into your imagination, and ask the question, "How far can you travel on Sunday?"

This question in our present-day world is usually answered in terms of automobile mileage. "I did five hundred miles over the week end" — that is frequently the apex of Sunday achievement. The intellectual and spiritual possibilities of the day dwindle down into the consumption of gasoline, oil, and food. The week-end pilgrim is frequently one

"Who, born for the universe
Narrowed his mind
And to motion gave up
What was meant for mankind."

What a travesty this is on all that Sabbath-day journeys in mind and soul have been and may be. J. B. Priestly in his *Midnight on the Desert* says with sure penetration, "We cannot seek grace through gadgets." Yet that is exactly what millions in our gadget-crammed world are trying to do.

A Sabbath day's journey, in worship and fellowship, may be a journey from earth to heaven. That journey has been made times without number. Not that many people have been caught up in their Sunday worship into a mystical seventh heaven. But there is the record of those who have

had the certain experience that "surely God is in this place." Sunday's high moments have spread their influence over the other days of the week and given daily life a lift. Lascelles Abercrombie says that Tennyson had "a genius for experiencing, with astonishing sensibility, and for rendering, with equally astonishing nicety, that part of life which exists in moments." The best part of life exists in moments in which man catches a vision of the reality that encircles him. Hilaire Belloc presents that very picture of spiritual possibility when he writes, in his *Life of Milton*, of the means by which "man, the exile of the outer night, got a glimpse of light through a crevice." All that may be a Sabbath day's journey of the mind and spirit. One poet has thus recorded this accumulation of great moments:

"I will make a last song when I am old,
Out of the shining of remembered days."

The Sabbath-day journey may be one from the world outside to the self. What a frivolous waste of time to do all one's traveling in space and never break a path into that land of mystery, one's own self. Many returning globe-trotters are just like empty suitcases covered with hotel labels. Walter Duranty has given us a valuable motto, one which stresses the value of the inner journey. He says that when he went to Russia he adopted a rule: "Never analyze events without first analyzing yourself."

Try that Sabbath day's journey!

ABOVE THE STREET LEVEL

The upper chamber. ACTS 1:13

In the reading and study of the Bible, everyone needs to warn himself repeatedly to beware of reading into the details of narrative significances which simply are not there. Far

too much fanciful exegesis of the Scriptures, usually labeled "spiritual interpretation," is like the definition of woman's intuition — that power which "enables her to see through a brick wall to what isn't on the other side." There is no mystical or esoteric meaning or symbolism in the fact that before Pentecost the disciples met in an upper room. It is quite evident that they met in the room which was available for their meeting; that was all.

But if we take the upper room simply as a picture, there is a real correspondence between the physical circumstance and the spiritual actuality. The disciples in the upper room did get away from the street level of thinking. They were above the least common denominator of the Jerusalem of their day.

It is by no means a fanciful stretching of fact to say that great and significant movements in history do start from upper rooms, elevated above street levels of life and thought.

This is particularly important to remember in a day when large numbers seem so impressive. The mental line of least resistance comes to be the least common denominator, and that is never a source of social progress. Barbara Spofford Morgan writes that of all agencies for achieving social welfare the collective mind is the poorest.⁹

The level of thinking is a primary social problem. For our deepest problems come from the level of our life. G. K. Chesterton once said that what was wrong with Omar Khayyam was that he sat in the cellar and believed that it was the only room in the house. An essential conflict in our world is that between those who dwell intellectually and spiritually in the upper room and those who remain on the street level or "in the cellar."

This conflict has sharp edge in the life and work of the church at the present time. One of the most serious aspects of contemporary church life is the wide and deep gap that exists between the laymen and the ministers in the realm

of the social application of Christianity. The common picture is that of a socially minded liberal in the pulpit preaching to stolid conservatives in the pew, or to those who do little social thinking or none at all. It is a disturbing picture, for we have it on good authority that "a house divided against itself cannot stand." Consequently we hear many earnest ministers urging that the gap be closed. But the means proposed for closing the gap is often that of inducing the ministers to come down from the upper level to the common street, to renounce going any farther in their thinking than the local business community is willing to go.

What a tragic betrayal of Christian leadership such a descent involves is described in memorable terms by Robert S. and Helen Lynd in their survey of Muncie, Indiana, entitled *Middletown in Transition*. The chapter on religion presents a picture of the dreary spiritual waste which results when the street level of thinking is substituted for the gospel. These writers say, "As branches of the trunk line of Middletown's life, one finds them for the most part preaching what Middletown already believes." There has been a consistent avoidance of controversial issues. "There is emotional loyalty, but when this world of emotional values cuts athwart Middletown's labor problem, or the city's devotion to such more immediate symbols as those identified with patriotism, people's reactions are almost unvaryingly determined by their loyalty to these more immediate things rather than to the religious symbols."

"The gap between religious verbalizing and Middletown's life," they continue, "has become so wide that the entire institution of religion has tended to be put on the defensive and the acceptance of a defensive role has tended to mean that it is timid in jeopardizing its foothold in the culture by espousing unpopular causes, when they appear in the economic order, in questions of world peace, and in the ele-

ments of contradiction in local institutions. On almost every issue where controversy waxes hot in Middletown's current world, the local churches take over the causes and symbols of the local business control group." ¹⁰

Surely the Christian religion as pictured in the Book of Acts was never meant to shrink into this puny, frightened thing.

THE BRIDGE OF HABIT

Where they were in the habit of meeting. ACTS 1:13

Here, as on so many occasions in history, we see a great volume of traffic going over a fixed bridge of habit. The disciples had come to a crucial place in their way of life. The old chapter was ended. The new one had not yet begun. They were suspended between two worlds. New purposes, plans, associations, all were in an undetermined future. The one thing to which they clung in this uncertain but creative time was a fixed habit of meeting together. The meeting, at least, could go on. And because it did go on the emerging Christian church found a bridge by which it could cross the chasm of uncertainty. The continued habit of association and worship made it possible for new purposes to develop and a new creation, the church, to come into being.

Habit is organized possibility. The disciples' "fixed place" of meeting, their habit of association, was a fixed point amid the flux.

Reflection on the enormous contribution made to the world's spiritual destiny by the continuance of habit in a perilous time sets in a new light the old subject of church going.

Many have succumbed to a soft and speciously "liberal"

attitude on the question of church attendance. To insist on church attendance as something of really vital import seems somehow to smack of a narrow "Puritanism." This attitude has curious parallels to the self-congratulatory prayer of the Pharisee in Jesus' parable. Today many thank God in complacent terms that they are not like their benighted ancestors, who actually regarded regular church going as a Christian duty. The result of this loose thinking is that, in our own turbulent period, when one world is dead and another as yet powerless to be born, the church is without a fixed bridge of habit across which it—and humanity with it—can make new journeys to a fairer future.

The service of habit in crucial times has been tersely commented on by Dr. R. E. Welch. He says: "There are 'dead-points' in our course of life, when we are caught in some crosscurrents or unmanning crises, when we swing loose in the trough of the seas, unable to create fresh energies. At these times of pressure or relaxed will power, we are very liable to be submerged and ruined unless good habit comes to the rescue. It is the momentum of long continued custom that carries us onward across the 'dead-point' until we have escaped the stress of confusion and recoil, and rally our better energies of mind for fresh endeavors. No man is safe unless he has such carry-over forces of accumulated habit."

Rudyard Kipling expressed this same truth with characteristic vividness a few years ago when, in the course of an address at a boys' school, he said, "Every man is sixteen years old in a pinch." That is, what we revert to in times of stress is the habits which have been built into brain cells and nerve tissue. They take command in a time of crisis. Any American who has ever driven an automobile in England can add the testimony of his own personal experience to the truth of this statement of Kipling's. For a thousand miles the newly acquired habits of driving on the left side of the

road are in undisturbed ascendancy. Then in a "pinch" one reverts to driving on the right side of the road, a tendency which is more deeply rooted in the reflex centers of the brain.

This continued coming together on the part of the disciples before Pentecost is worthy of study and thought by the church of today. Again we have come upon uncertain days, which may be in a profound sense formative. A fixed habit of assemblage, worship and thought may furnish a bridge by which the spiritual traffic of today may go to meet tomorrow's need and opportunity.

A FAMILY CHURCH

Both Peter and John, James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.

ACTS 1:13

Listen to the roll call in the upper room at Jerusalem, as we catch echoes of it in the thirteenth verse of the first chapter of Acts. Then consider this thought: Take away four families from this first Christian church and what is left? Not much. Then hold that against this further thought: Take away four families from the average small church today and what is left? In most cases there is not much left except fragments of a body from which the heart and soul have been removed.

Thus we get a fresh glimpse of the high importance of what has come to be known as "the family church." Ministers have been known to speak a bit disdainfully of a particular church as a "family church," as though it were a rather delightful but relatively minor enterprise, quite on the fringe

of the really big business for the kingdom. The "downtown" church is the worthy goal of ambition. That is something on which to try one's mettle! Or a "college church" is considered as having strategic importance. But a "family church" — just a cluster of family groups, in which, according to an early model, "not many wise, not many noble" are gathered, not located in a place of geographical dominance — that is all very well in its way; often however it is regarded from the point of view of ecclesiastical ambition as a place to go *from*, not to stay *with*.

But this company in the upper room, when closely scrutinized, brings new standards of measurement. It corrects the distortions that rise from our modern ecclesiastical astigmatism. For the First Church of Jerusalem was emphatically and almost completely a family church. Here was the Zebedee family with James and John on the official board. Here was another family with the brothers Peter and Andrew. Here were some of Jesus' own family. It is a perfect picture of what most churches are. Here are the Jones', the Browns, the Robinsons, the Smiths. Just a family church. But as such it follows the original pattern of the most tremendous force in history.

It was natural for the Christian church to grow from family relationships. Christianity found a first field for its transforming influence in primary human institutions. In *Marius the Epicurean* Walter Pater, with sure insight, pictures Marius as being influenced to think consentingly of Christianity largely because of its influence on the family and on the place which children held in those early Christian homes. He perceived that there was something in Christianity which cleansed and consecrated the elementary functions of life. The First Church was inevitably a family church.

The family church has a great inheritance. It should lift itself up to a new sense of worth and importance. What

did Jesus leave to the world? Much every way. But high among his legacies was this: he left a family church.

UP IN THE ATTIC

The upper chamber. ACTS 1:13

The phrase "the upper room" has about it a lasting glamour, largely from its allegorical use. But there is one aspect of the use of upper rooms in the Jerusalem of the first half of the first Christian century which is rarely recorded but which is well worth pondering for its historical associations and for its suggestiveness for the present day. Upper rooms were quite generally the homes of the poor. Lake and Cadbury comment on this verse: "The translation 'attic' is too strong, and 'upper room' is too weak. The collection of quotations by Wettstein goes to show that the custom was frequent of subletting an upper room, and that it was the accommodation of the poor."¹¹

Historically Christianity had its origin among the poor. It may well be that this place of meeting was a sort of attic where the poor could afford to take lodging. Christianity was in that sense an "attic philosophy," one of the many movements issuing from the places where the poor dwelt which have profoundly influenced the world. Of course, Christianity was not an economic movement; yet we can never rightly understand it unless we keep in mind the fact of its origin among the poor.

Many great movements have come from "attics." Samuel Ely Morrison, in his *Builders of the Bay Colony*, makes a shrewd comment which bears directly on this truth. Writing of the Cambridge Platonists, who were so closely allied with the movements which led to the founding of the New

England colony, he says, "I sometimes wish that New England had been founded by Cambridge Neo-Platonists instead of by Cambridge Puritans — but Dukes and Neo-Platonists do not emigrate." True; pioneers are rarely philosophers or aristocrats; they come from "attics."

There are two points in this historical connection for today's guidance.

First, watch the attics. The determining movements of today are not issuing from imposing street entrances — not from chambers of commerce, First National banks, Liberty leagues or other respectable fronts. They are being born in attics, in cheap upper rooms.

Second, get into an attic. Acquire an understanding sympathy and relationship with the most significant movements of the time, "of the people and for the people."

THE MOTHER OF JESUS

*Continued steadfastly in prayer . . . with Mary,
the mother of Jesus.* ACTS 1:14

Here is a fleeting glimpse of a chapter in Mary's life which has been almost totally obscured in the reverence with which she has been covered. (Instead of "covered" one almost writes "smothered.")

After the high days of that last week at Jerusalem, after the supreme experiences of the arrest, trial, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, after drama, tragedy and grief, Mary takes her place as one of the number forming the Christian fellowship and church.

At first glance this might seem a strange anticlimax. For a chief figure in so momentous a chapter in history, one who

had borne such a burden of grief, to become numbered as one among many, quietly taking a place in the ranks of those bent on a new undertaking, might well seem a descent into plain, pedestrian prose.

It was, however, a real climax. Mary's action channeled great experiences into the ongoing purposes of life. And that is always a great climax. It is the great achievement of picking life up again after tumult and catastrophe and making it new. It is the renouncing of what might have been regarded as a claim of exemption due to personal position or grief, and taking one's place in the ranks for daily service and fellowship. Mary showed a victorious way of dealing with grief — by transcending it through turning its great emotion into steady power. So often grief is made an excuse for nonparticipation in associated effort. Grief frequently results in a paralyzing fixation of personality and character. The procession of life is definitely halted at the point in experience where the great loss occurred. And over such a life is often written the epitaph in *Hamlet*, "The rest is silence." Mary showed a more excellent way.

The presence of the name of Mary, mother of Jesus, in the list of the makers of the church, throws light on another great problem in the management of life, that of making great inspirations available for the plainest labor. These should not be kept locked away from "human nature's daily need." A beautiful picture of the relationship which should hold between great experience and daily work is given by Mrs. Thirkell, the granddaughter of Burne-Jones the painter, in her reminiscences. She says that Burne-Jones put one of his beautiful windows with the Holy Grail over the sink where the scullery maid washed up. Mary put great memories into a place in her life where they might be a power for ongoing tasks.

MULTIPLY BY TEN

*There was a multitude of persons gathered together,
about a hundred and twenty.* ACTS I:15

This estimate of the number of the "brethren" present with Peter at Pentecost is very evidently guesswork. The number, one hundred and twenty, is one of those round numbers so often found in Scripture, the result of tradition. It represents no exact census of the company present. It is quite plainly the number of the twelve multiplied by ten.

But that very process of multiplication by the traditional number ten has close and genuine relationship to experience and bears a permanent suggestion for the church. Ten is a multiplying number rooted in actual experience. It represents rather accurately the range of any person's natural, immediate influence. One person's influence normally extends to about ten other persons. These generally include the family and the most immediate friends. This ratio finds expression in military practice from the time of the Roman Empire to the present day; the proportion of army officers to soldiers is about one to ten.

So that the number, one hundred and twenty, represents the most real possibilities of expansion for a church. Let twelve men exert their influence over the ten others most immediately possible for them to touch, and the twelve become one hundred and twenty.

One of the most persistent of superstitions is that of magic numbers or lucky numbers. Fagin in *Oliver Twist* gives his philosophy of magic numbers (a philosophy widely held): "Some conjurers say that the number three is the magic number and some say number seven. It's neither, my friend, neither. It's number one." He consistently

lived out this philosophy of magic numbers — “ Me first, number one second, and if there’s anything left, I’ll take it.”

Ten is the lucky number for a church.

Here is a prescription or recipe for a living, growing church: Take any number and multiply it by ten; let each person radiate outward along the lines of his natural associations, among the ten who constitute his most immediate sphere of influence. In that process there are some of the conditions of a genuine Pentecost.

A NAME ON THE ROLL

For he [Judas] was numbered among us. ACTS I:17

Here in a word was the tragedy of Judas: He was numbered *with* the company, but was not *of* it. Here in a word is a chief liability of life: We may be merely names on the roll and not a real part of the enterprise.

We may be reckoned, as Judas was, outwardly in relation to the church or to great human causes, but have no inward assimilation; or the once existent inward assimilation may decay, as doubtless happened with Judas. We see this liability plainly in many a chance conversation of daily life. One such was overheard recently. A man on a streetcar was reading to a companion an account of the death of a prominent citizen, evidently a well known acquaintance of both of them. The reader came to the words, “ The funeral will be held in the First Methodist Church.” Here he paused and exclaimed, “ Well, well, Smith a Methodist! Who would have guessed it? What do you know about that? ” Any chance listener to the conversation would have known a great deal about that! He would know that Smith was

numbered with the company, but was not of it. His manner of living gave no hint to his daily associates that he was a disciple of Jesus. What more terrible epitaph could one have than the spontaneous comment, when his church affiliation was revealed, "What do you know about that!"

Dr. Albert Einstein, in the course of an article written not many years ago, inadvertently gave a picture of this attitude of inadequate relationship to the company and purposes of the church of Christ. He was explaining his feeling about the League of Nations. "I am rarely enthusiastic," he wrote, "about what the League of Nations has done or has not done, but I am always thankful that it exists." This frank expression of a tepid, nonparticipating approval sums up with deadly exactness the attitude of many in the church who are merely numbered with the company. Another suggestive picture is that of Dr. W. R. Maltbie of England. He says, "Some people in church look like guests at a royal banquet, who couldn't afford to be left out, but have been forbidden by their doctor to eat anything." Contrast that with the lines of Robert Louis Stevenson:

" Away with funeral music — set
The pipe to powerful lips —
The cup of life's for him who drinks
And not for him who sips."

The seat of the trouble is often a lightly worn allegiance which never strikes down to the deeper centers of the mind and spirit. There is a startling and searching suggestiveness in a detail of French history. It was during the excited days when Napoleon, escaped from the Island of Elba, was rapidly marching on Paris. The Bourbon monarch had fled. While waiting for Napoleon at the palace some courtiers, preparing to turn their own coats, noticed that the fleur-de-lis on the carpet of the throne room was merely sewed on. Someone

tugged at a lily; it came off readily and lo! there was a bee under it. The next moment ladies in court dress were hard at work tearing off the Bourbon emblems. In less than half an hour the carpet was imperial once more.

Emblems of allegiance lightly sewed on, ready to be ripped off with changing fortunes — that is something to think about!

GETTING INTO THE PAST TENSE

Judas . . . was numbered. ACTS 1:17

The character of Judas is so many-sided, his story is so largely in the dimly lighted room of a complex personality, that it is impossible to sum up the man in a single word or to read his history in terms of a single trait or motive. We can never say with any justifiable confidence, "Here we have caught him."

But among the many things which bear on Judas, here in this simple historical statement is certainly one aspect of his life. His was the tragedy of getting prematurely into the past tense. There is a solemn finality about the tense. "He was numbered." It is all over. The words have the genuine pathos of "it used to be." All the promise of greatness was once a reality. No more. He reached the desert spot of experience where there was no present, no future; only the past.

There is, of course, a glory of the past tense. We see it in old age where promise has been carried through to fruition. There is a glory when one can read the record of finished fact. Paul expresses this: "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." But such past history has no sepulchral echo, as does the past from which no flower or fruit grows.

We hear that sad echo in the unfulfilled promise of an

artist who has compromised his ideals, allowed his dreams to be forgotten or his purposes to be pared down. Frances Winwar evokes the pathos of the past tense in her sharp delineation of John Everett Millais. After describing his great powers in his early career she says: "He remained a facile painter, a charming man of the world, an inevitable academician, ambitious of social and popular success. He was jealous of anyone who threatened his supremacy, jealous of Hunt, and later of Leighton and Whistler. 'Too damn clever,' he said of the latter. He would have liked to be too damn clever himself. Yet at the end, at a great retrospective exhibition of his works he was seen to stand long before his earlier paintings. 'I didn't paint so badly in those days,' he said."¹²

"In those days"!

To many persons Disraeli's description of some of the elder statesmen of his day would apply: "Extinct volcanoes." Once there was fire, heat, light.

Once there was fire and light in Judas. But he wandered, in his early years, into the past tense.

THE UNWORKED CLAIM

He was numbered among us. ACTS 1:17

He "obtained the rank in this ministry," as Weymouth translates it. His claim was all staked out. The papers were in proper order. Judas rated as one of the disciples. But the claim was never worked. It was an unfulfilled possibility.

The world is full of unworked claims, like abandoned mining claims which are all staked out, entered on the books, but with nothing dug.

Much of the impotence of Christianity today comes from unworked claims. In discussing the call to the nation to return to religion, issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury on New Year's day, 1937, Professor J. H. Muirhead says that "the drift from religion" may be founded less on moral frowardness or naturalistic determinism than on "a decline in the power to transmute vision into action."

REAL ESTATE VERSUS UNREAL ESTATE

*Now this man obtained a field with the reward of
his iniquity.* ACTS I:18

These words present a sharp etching of at least a part of the tragedy of Judas. A villain in the plot was real estate. Judas paid for a solid piece of ground with thirty pieces of silver—and his soul. His story was, in part at least, the familiar one of the conflict between the tangible and the intangible. A field was something tangible, something *real*, compared to the intangible aims of Jesus. Judas' final choice was for real estate.

Frequently the common phrase of tribute to the "practical" man—"He had his feet on the ground"—means, "He had his feet in the grave." The exaltation of real estate results in a subtle distortion of values, whereby whatever is not real estate becomes "unreal" estate. That way of thinking takes hold of the spirit and brings death to it.

There is a disturbingly modern touch in the comment of Lake and Cadbury: "An 'estate in the country' or 'a farm,' is the meaning rather than a field."¹⁸ We can almost get the picture of the estate as it was to be—"Judas Manor."

For a large number of people "an estate in the country"

represents real estate bought at the price of all that is intangible and "unreal" when weighed on the market scales or measured by standards of the social register, but which is in fact man's greatest wealth. Almost they pronounce a law of spiritual regression: "As real estate increases to dominate the mind and soul, the quest for spiritual and social values declines." Walter Weyel in his book, *Tired Radicals*, puts into contemporary terms the working of this law. He writes with irony of those among us who "marry pleasant wives, beget interesting children, and begin to build homes in the country," and retire disastrously from all real participation in the human struggle for a fairer future. "How preternaturally practical they become!" he exclaims. "How they grow enamored of the Indifferent because better than the Bad, and of the Bad because better than the Worse. How they decline into feeble, dwarfed enthusiasms, the pale ghosts of their former ambitions."

Contrast with this sorry "ghost story" the stirring description of man's "unreal" estate in the form of moral integrity and fighting spirit as given in the classic words of William James in his *Moral Equivalent of War*: "The liberation from material attachments, the unbribed soul, the manlier indifference, the paying our way by what we are and do and not by what we have, the right to fling away our life at any moment irresponsibly, the more athletic trim — in short, the moral fighting shape."

Look also at the reverse of the process which went on in Judas as it is found in the fourth chapter, thirty-sixth verse, of Acts: "And Barnabas . . . having a field, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet."

Barnabas took the proceeds of real estate and invested them in unreal estate.

WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTION

Of these, one must become a witness with us, of his resurrection.

ACTS I:22

There is still a sunrise glow to this description of the task of a Christian disciple. When it was necessary to elect one to take the place of Judas among the disciples, the work to which he was called is defined in a bit of incidental description — it might well be called, “incidental music” — “a witness of his resurrection.”

Nowhere could there be found a truer or more alluring description of the Christian vocation in the world. A disciple is not an official, an officeholder. His is a vital function — to be a witness. He is to walk among men as living evidence of the eternal reality of the spiritual world.

How can we become witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus? Taken literally, that question is more than a bit ridiculous. We did not see the resurrection. Even the most erudite scholar in the world can summon no legal proofs of it.

The effective “proof” of the resurrection can never be found in a court of evidence or a book of history. The persuasive witness lies in two realms: the moral power of Christian faith and discipleship, and the irrefutable evidence of a life worth preserving. Professor Frank C. Porter has succinctly put this witness in his description of Paul as being not “the author of a speculation but the communicator of an experience.”¹⁴

It is the Christian experience of the high meaning of life which undergirds the conviction that its realized values will be conserved. It is when the sense of the great meaning of the whole of life grows dim or sputters out that the idea of

the reality of the eternal world becomes blurred and faint. On every hand is expressed what Sophocles put into haunting words at the end of one of his choruses: "O ye deathward-going tribes of men, what do your lives mean except that they go to nothingness?" The only effective positive answer to that feeling of the nothingness of existence is the realized experience that there is a total meaning in life. Professor William E. Hocking maintains that the specific meanings of life, such as the worth of merely being alive, of activity and accomplishment, of love and appreciation, of serving causes and uniting in them love and a power and the worth of fulfilling destiny, all depend on a vision and assurance of some total meaning of life.¹⁵ It is those who communicate this sense of meaning who are the authentic witnesses of eternity.

Only by living in the power of an endless life can Jesus ever be released from a book and step out of history into history in the making.

"Jesus shut within a book
Is not worth a passing look.
Jesus prisoned in a creed
Is a fruitless Lord, indeed.
But Jesus in the hearts of men
Shows his tenderness again."¹⁶

When the exuberant witness of life which has the confident note of reality is muted, immortality becomes merely a subject for discussion. A penetrating and searching observation of an "outsider," Heywood Broun, states this truth sharply. Writing about an Easter celebration in New York City, he says: "Even the churches seem to me insufficiently touched by the festival. I don't mean that I shopped around and heard all the sermons, but I read a good many in the papers. I failed to catch any clarion notes. Many ministers

have commented on the waning influence of the church, and generally they blame the jazz age. It is held that man today has grown jaded and insensitive to the finer things of life. I disagree. Not man so much but the ministry has turned smug, satisfied and worldly minded. It isn't that the community turns a somewhat inattentive ear toward the preachers because they advance a scheme of life too difficult and lofty. The thing they ask for isn't good enough. They have succeeded in reducing a daring and revolutionary philosophy to a series of dull and petty compromises. Mystics and saints never fail to capture the imagination of humankind in any age." 17

The second great realm of witnessing, inextricably related to the first, can be stated in one sentence: The final proof of immortality is a life worth preserving.

THE FIRST CHURCH ELECTION

And the lot fell upon Matthias. ACTS 1:26

Here is the first entry upon a page which has not been the brightest in church history — ecclesiastical elections, whether it be the election of a pope or of a second assistant recording secretary of some society. The election of Matthias as a member of the company of disciples has many angles of permanent interest. But among them one fact is deserving of remembrance: After his election Matthias was never heard from again. And that has been one of the great and real liabilities of being elected to office. The office often swallows up the man, and the personality, smothered with roles or insignia, becomes a total loss.

To make this historical and psychological observation in connection with Matthias is very probably to do him a

grievous injustice. Very few of the records of the apostolic age have been preserved. Matthias may well have been a great missionary; he may well have been one of the noble company of the martyrs; we do not know. But the bare fact that he never was heard from again after his election may give us pause. That silence contains a warning to all officials — to all on whom “the lot has fallen,” to the hierarchy of officially chosen leaders, delegates to conferences, pastors, professors, secretaries, superintendents, bishops, archbishops, and all higher and lower angels.

Any office tends in a subtle way to become a substitute for the personality which should give it meaning and distinction. Insidious paralyzing poisons tend to work their way through officeholders. They may become “officialized,” that word being a circumlocution for “fossilized”; they may swell up with megalomania; they may be rendered voiceless by an acute attack of caution. Like Matthias, they may never be heard from again.

Queen Victoria, with shrewd sense and observation, once wrote to a clergyman whom she had appointed bishop of Rochester that she hoped his new office would not ruin him as a preacher. She pointed out gently that she had noticed that most bishops, except the Bishop of St. Albans, her beloved Dr. Boyd-Carpenter, did not preach so well after their elevation to the episcopacy as they had done before! Another observer of many bishops once made the comment that the ritual for the consecration of bishops might well be revised to include a portion of the burial service and read, “Whereas the soul of this brother has departed, we therefore commit his body to the Pullman car.”

This kind of liability cometh out only by prayer and fasting!

THE FIRST DEFEATED CANDIDATE

And they put forward two, Joseph called Barsabas who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

ACTS 1:23

This is the only mention in the New Testament of Joseph called Barsabas. He is one of a large company of people who have achieved a strange, vague sort of immortality through a moment's passing under the sharply focused light of the New Testament record, just as a window at sunset may be briefly illuminated by a passing ray. All that we know about Joseph is that he was the first defeated candidate for office in Christian history. But that is enough to make us pause and wonder, enough to make us do a bit of self-examination.

How did he take his defeat? We do not know. We have no further record, as we have no further record of Matthias, the successful candidate. But we have all seen enough of defeated candidates to cause us to raise many questions. We know the destructive possibilities of defeat only too well. Did he grow "sour"? It is so easy to magnify personal disappointments and losses. Once in a moment of keen self-appraisal John Keats wrote, "If I stub my toe, in five minutes, it becomes a theme for Sophocles." How many "themes for Sophocles" have we constructed out of our little disappointments?

Did Joseph called Barsabas wallow in self-pity? Did his participation in the work of the company slacken and die? Did his relationship with Matthias become spoiled through jealousy?

What kind of subordinate did he prove to be? To play well the role of subordinate requires rare qualities. There are many who are equal to the rank of chief; they fail miserably at the part which in many testing ways is the more difficult,

that of subordinate. General George B. McClellan is a classic example. His biographer says: "He was in a way one of the worst subordinates and best superiors that ever lived. As a subordinate he was restless, critical, often ill at ease and seemingly unwilling to cooperate with his colleagues or his superiors. He knew what was best, and others were, in his estimation, ignorant or insincere. Or he seemed to have the proverbial chip always poised on his cultivated and aristocratic shoulders, the latter for the most part carefully adorned with proper insignia of his rank and military station."¹⁸

Did Joseph achieve the glory of serving in the ranks, of forgetting self-assertion in great and intense preoccupation with the cause of Christ?

How fascinating it would be to know something of the afteryears of Joseph called Barsabas surnamed Justus! Fascinating, yes; but not nearly so important as the answer to another question which emerges from this brief sight of him: How do *we* take defeats?

SUCCESSOR TO JUDAS

To take the place from which Judas fell away.

ACTS 1:25

Every one of us, at some time and in some connection, will be cast for the role of a predecessor. Everyone over thirty years of age has already been a predecessor in many capacities. The little picture of Matthias who became the successor of Judas ought to induce some sharp and not altogether pleasant thinking. This man started on his work with a terrific handicap from the character and action of his predecessor. What will our successors succeed to? What sort of aroma will cling to the words, "successor to me"? The first question often asked about an office when it is being considered is, "Who

has been filling the office? ” The answer has much to do with determining the nature and difficulty of the task. Every father of a son has a successor whose task and inheritance have been largely shaped by his predecessor.

Let this designation remain in mind and heart: “Successor to Judas.”

A BLAST

*And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of
the rushing of a mighty wind.* ACTS 2:12

A good many words are used in the attempt of the various translators of the New Testament to capture something of the quality of the phrase, “the wind of God.” But every word selected conveys the note of violence. Here we have in the Revised Version, “mighty wind.” Weymouth calls it “a blast”; Moffatt translates, “a violent blast”; Cadbury and Lake, a “violent breeze.” In all this list there is one word which is absent. No one called it a “zephyr.” The dictionary defines a zephyr as a “light, gentle breeze.”

Pentecost did not begin with a zephyr. Yet some churches have never known anything but a zephyr. They would capsize under a blast. Their only hymn has been (to the mild, soft tinkle of guitars),

“If on a quiet sea
Toward Heaven I calmly sail.”

A violent blast is what our world so often and so desperately needs from the church. Of course, violence itself has no spiritual value. Vocal violence can be, and most often is, just empty wind. Many a preacher has been self-deceived by the physical and emotional exhilaration of anger and denunciation into thinking that gratifying nervous excitement

is divine inspiration. Such excitement is no more spiritual in quality than the intoxication produced by whiskey, which it more than faintly resembles. Dr. Fosdick has said with great pertinence that a man is never preaching when he is merely "getting something off his chest." St. Paul gave the advice to "try the prophets." We must also "try" carefully these alleged prophetic inspirations to see whether they are instinct with Christian love and dedication to God, or are mostly composed of resounding violence.

Yet with all necessary self-examination and guarding we find that God uses a "blast." There are times and occasions when nothing else will do his work. The sound of the violent blast which blew upon the world at Pentecost should echo in the memory of churches which are propelled, if at all, only by balmy zephyrs. John Milton, in his *Reason of Church Government*, has put this truth into words wherein the force of a noble soul sounds out in noble English prose: "To every good and peaceable man it must in nature be a hateful thing to be a displeaser and molester of thousands; much better would it like him doubtless to be a messenger of gladness and contentment. . . . But when God commands to take the trumpet to blow a dolorous or jarring blast, it lies not in man's will what he shall say or what he shall conceal."¹⁹

FIRE IN THE HEAD

And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each of them.

ACTS 2:3

Spiritual endowment has been conventionally symbolized by a halo *around* the head. It is more truly marked by something which goes deeper — fire *in* the head. Lake and Cad-

bury comment on this verse, "Fire about the head occurs in both Jewish and Gentile thought as a mark of supernatural favor." ²⁰

The supernatural favor urgently needed in our world is a head afire with the ardent glow and flame of the mind of Christ. We make so many gifts to express religious devotion — gifts of the feet, of the hands, of that emotional substitute for the thinking brain which is called the heart. But we so often refrain from dedicating the head, the painful intellectual act of grasping Christian truth and tracing out its implications for our common life. Yet the gift of the spirit which does not have a halo in one's thinking is a specious thing.

Sainthood marked by intellectual activity and power is a supreme need today, as always. Two men recently watched a moving picture of a characteristic sort, marked by marvelous dancing and an inane plot. After it was over one said to the other, "We seem to be in a world where the feet are more important than the head." That comment is apt. We are in a world of moving feet, millions of feet scurrying after Pied Piper leaders on the double-quick to disaster. Today more feet nervously goose-step in soldiers' boots than ever before. A generation ago, during the Boer War, Rudyard Kipling caught the tramp of soldiers' boots on the errands of imperialism:

"Foot-slog-slog-slog, sloggin' over Africa.

Foot, foot, foot, foot, sloggin' over Africa,

Boots, boots, boots, boots, movin' up and down again."

Boots are still over Africa — Italian boots this time. German and Italian boots have been slogging over Spain, Japanese boots over China.

Into this parade of moving feet there must come a company of moving minds. We have a common phrase to describe wholehearted participation in a thing — "head over heels."

That phrase represents the first task of education and religion in our day: to get the head *over* the heels, so that the heels do not become the turntable of action. Indeed, without irreverence, we may recall the first question of the Shorter Catechism, "What is the chief end of man?" to which one true answer is, "The chief end of man is his head, not his feet."

Thomas Traherne has described succinctly the true nature of this inner mental halo in his words, "To think well is to serve God in the interior court." The same truth is expressed in R. Ellis Roberts' recent remark that "a determination to devote one's whole mind to the service of God is the mark of a saint which is too often neglected by the hagiographer." Of course the way of sainthood has never been easy. And this genuine type of sainthood, evidenced by fervent and straight Christian thinking in a crooked world, is a form of costly, sacrificial action. Rodin in his great statue "The Thinker" represents thinking as positive, painful action. He writes of this work of his that he sought to represent thinking as action rather than as beauty. "Nature," he said, "gives me in my model life and thought; the nostrils breathe, the heart beats, the lungs inhale, the being thinks and feels, has pains and joys, ambitions, passions, and emotions. These I must express. What makes my Thinker think is that he thinks not only with his brain, with his knitted brow, his distended nostrils and compressed lips, but with every muscle of his arms, back, and legs, with his clenched fists and gripping toes."

Such is our reasonable sacrifice. The crucial role of such a "halo in the head" has been well estimated by Carl S. Patton in his appeal for the dedicated mind. "The Christian thinker must think not merely about God, and the Bible, and the human soul, but about things often dismissed as economic or political. These are religious questions. They mean ad-

vancement or retreat not merely in wages and status and creature comfort, but in the spiritual life of our people. Justice or injustice, hope or despair, salvation or damnation, war or peace — if these are not religious questions, what are? If we do not think about them — not the political economists alone, not the sociologists, nor the Congressmen, nor the editors, but all of us — if we just ‘muddle through,’ it looks to me right now as if we might muddle through to a revolution, or at least to something worse than we have now. Noise will not help us. Nor passion, nor bluster, nor calling names. The thinkers must pull us through.”

THE UNIVERSALITY OF JESUS

Every man heard in his own tongue. ACTS 2:6

This is the supreme picture of the universality of Jesus. There is within his myriad-minded personality and work something which speaks directly to every sort of human condition, circumstance and need.

Both youth and age hear him speak in their own particular language.

Both weakness and strength hear the inevitable word for their condition.

Sorrow and joy hear each in its own tongue.

DO YOU AMAZE ANYBODY?

And they were all amazed. ACTS 2:12

If you have never played with a concordance you have missed an exhilarating sport. True, the Bible has suffered measurelessly from concordance fiends. The comment of Shake-

speare, "The evil that men do lives after them," applies in full measure to that quaint and noble and amusing soul, Alexander Cruden,²¹ the compiler of the first widely used concordance. The concordance has been a happy hunting ground for literalists for whom the Bible is a sort of book of logarithms or a collection of puzzles from which they can establish any thesis or dogma, no matter how fantastic, by a series of chain references, fearfully and wonderfully made!

Yet the concordance has its sound and fruitful uses. Try it on these words "amaze" and "amazement." They will prove to be doors into some of the central wonders of Christian history and experience. Only as we trace it through the Book of Acts can we realize what a characteristic word of apostolic Christianity that word "amazement" is. Try it for yourself. You will be freshly convinced that the gospel was, quite literally, "an amazing gospel." Its working in human life shocked people into a state of amazement.

Do we ever "shock" anybody? The British poet, W. H. Davies, has pointed out with fine insight that life is truly measured not by the number of breaths taken, but by the number not taken; in other words, by its breath-taking amazements, by beauty or wonder which causes one to hold his breath. Life is to be measured by spiritual intensity of experience rather than by extension of time. The true measurement of the working of the gospel is in its power to call forth amazement in the onlooker.

Just consider the list of strong, quivering verbs laid hold of by the translators in their endeavor to convey the effect of Pentecost: "astounded and bewildered" (Weymouth); "surprised and perplexed" (Lake and Cadbury); "amazed and astonished" (Moffatt). Such verbs ought to send the Christian reader to his knees with the question, "Would any one of those six verbs ever be needed to describe the effect that the Christian gospel, as embodied in me, has on people?"

Would they ever be needed to describe the effect our church has made on its surrounding community? If not, are we really in the apostolic succession?"

In our neatly mapped world, decorously marked out by the straight lines of prudence and common sense, do we ever amaze with a bit of unpredictable irrationality, with a flash of that Christian logic which is to the worldly Greeks mere foolishness? Do we ever show an improbable daring, or an adherence to God's ways which are higher than man's ways, so that beholders are compelled to say in the words of Moses at the strange burning of a bush, "I will turn aside and see this great sight"?

That this diagnosis of the sources of Christian power is not fantastic can be seen from the daily parade of history. The Christian faith and gospel command the wonder of men anew when the world is amazed — at the daring of a Niemöller defying the beast of nazism, at the sacrificial service of a Schweitzer, at the acts of a host of unrecorded men and women. Then Christian faith steps out of the story-book into life.

ASKING OR SCORNING

Some were perplexed, saying to one another, What meaneth this? . But others, mocking. . . .

ACTS 2:12-13

This little bit of description of the crowd's reaction to the preaching of Peter at Pentecost presents a dramatic glimpse of the two great parties into which the human race divides in the presence of a new fact, a new idea, a new process.

One group is amazed and perplexed, showing an attitude that may lead to interrogation and discovery. The other group responds with derision, contempt or scorn, attitudes that block advance and breed death.

Which group are you in? What is your most typical attitude in the presence of the new in the intellectual, economic, social or religious realm? Do you ask, or do you scorn?

To be sure, scorning is by far the easiest; it is always easier to use the emotions than the intellect. Scorn is also a defensive weapon. The new in any field conveys a vague threat to privilege or prestige or inertia. Scorn is a protective weapon. Professor W. H. Garrod has drawn an amusing picture of protective scorn in his description of Matthew Arnold, "dilating the nostril of a nervous dilettantism, not quite sure whether he can slay his enemy by disliking the smell of him."

But such scorn is the chief block to any sort of progress. It is a solid bulwark of social inertia. Our largest contribution to the world's future welfare is not to subscribe, first of all, to any set of conclusions; it is to use the instrument of an asking mind so that true conclusions can be reached.

Classic examples of swift scorn taking the place of thinking are James Russell Lowell's judgment of Whitman: "*Leaves of Grass* is a book I never looked into farther than to satisfy myself that it was a solemn humbug," and Carlyle's massive appraisal of Keats' poetry: "Fricassee of dead dog."

Are you an asker or a scorner?

THE ART OF STANDING UP

Peter, standing up with the eleven. ACTS 2:14

Here is a great theme: the men who stood up around the central figures in first century Christianity. Again and again we get a glimpse of a group who were the "backers." They were not the spokesmen, not the dramatic central figures in great action; they were the supporting cast, often mute. But they were there; they stood up with Peter. And without

them, without their undergirding support, no great story would have been acted.

We have a fine phrase in common use, "Stand up and be counted." That is exactly what the other disciples did on the day of Pentecost. And the count numbered up to eleven. That was enough to create the climate necessary for spiritual achievement.

Consider the divine mathematics represented in the numbers mentioned in the story of Pentecost, 1-11-120-3000. It sounds like a magic formula. It is. It represents the law of spiritual arithmetical and geometrical progression. First there was one, Peter. Then around him were the eleven, through whose backing he could say truly, "My strength is as the strength of eleven." Then there was the still larger company of supporters, roughly estimated at one hundred and twenty. Finally there was the company of those touched in their minds and hearts, roughly reckoned at three thousand. God never seems to move from one to three thousand unless there is somewhere in the action the enabling equivalent of these words, "standing up with the eleven."

Try to write this story in other terms and see how improbable it becomes. Suppose the eleven had merely stood about the fringe of the crowd. We so often do that. We have evolved a skillful technique in becoming merely "innocent bystanders" when real trouble emerges. If it had not been visibly demonstrated that Peter was not alone in his bold message, but that right with him were eleven men irrevocably committed to his cause and Christ's, first century history would have been vastly different. So many of us, in contrast, keep a watchful eye on the crowd to note its reactions; and if they prove unfavorable we can quickly scurry to the safety of a "judicial" position and give out a statement: "It is a very interesting point of view which has been expressed, but personally I do not hold with extremes."

Or what would have happened if no one had stood up?

That, too, often takes place. How the world thunders today at those of us who might make up a potential eleven, "Sit down!"

VISIONS AND DREAMS

And your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams.

ACTS 2:17

There are two aspects of these very familiar words which may perhaps be underlined to advantage.

First: Unless old men dream dreams the young men who are their children will rarely see visions. The spiritual poverty of one generation often roots in the failure of the preceding generation to leave any great legacy of unfulfilled dreams. It is easy for old men to bewail the degeneracy of the oncoming generation. Such lamentations have been a chief occupation of oldsters from the dawn of recorded history. But the venerable company at the Wailing Wall, who so loudly condemn the "lack of idealism" in the new breed of youngsters, also condemn themselves. When old men have not handed on to their children the disturbance of high dreams it is hard for the children to discover the atmosphere in which seeing visions is natural.

Consider two generations in the United States for evidence of this truth. Recall the solemn and severe denunciations of the jazz age, the "irresponsible children" of the "riotous twenties" of this century. With what stout whips the "flaming youth" of that post-war period was castigated! We may say that that particular generation deserved chastisement. But was its lack of spiritual vision any more striking than the absence of aspiring dreams in the generation that preceded it? Are youth and age, vision and dream not re-

lated as effect to cause? Where, at the turn of the century, was the longing dream of the church for a Christlike world? Here and there the light of a Rauschenbusch or a Gladden showed that the line of dreamers and prophets was not extinct. But the age in which the great exploiting forces of our modern world gathered headway was not marked by the stir of messianic dreaming. Accommodation to the codes of an expanding industrialism, rather than challenge in the name of Christ, was the prevailing mood. And as a result many of the children were born blind. For youth catches very subtly from its elders what, in spite of beautiful professions, are their underlying desires.

Those who at the present moment must be classed with the elders still have it in their power to do the indispensable service of contributing a dream, a hope, a faith toward a fairer future. For our day, so clutteringly filled with the mechanisms and raw material for a spiritually great civilization, desperately needs a dream for their noble use. As Carlton Talbot overhears the voicing of this need:

“ I'll lend you my Age
With its steel and its steam
And its manifold marvels —
You lend me your dream
For a day, for a week,
For as long as you please;
And it should be a bargain —
But no guarantees! ”

Arthur Schnabel, the interpreter of Beethoven, once remarked, “ I only play music that is better than it can be played.” That is the sort of music the world needs to stir it — better music than can be played.

The other comment called forth by this passage from Acts is that unless a person sees visions when he is young he will

not dream dreams when he is old. He needs the experience of the "long, long thought of youth" if there is to be any afterglow in old age. Or to change the figure, if there has been no capital investment in faith, hope and love, in the form of vision, there will be no interest coming into age. Youth is the period of grace when the quality of life can be determined. The night cometh when no man can match the ardors and endurances of earlier days. As A. E. Housman expressed it in the introduction to *Last Poems*: "I can no longer expect to be visited by the continuous excitement under which in the early months of 1895 I wrote the greater part of my other book."

Whatever may be the sum total of our opinions about Soviet Russia, there is the memorable spectacle which twenty years have given the world, of how much of its strength derives from youth. It has shown the universal qualities of youth — impatience for action, readiness to break with the past, willingness to make personal sacrifices in the pursuit of the ideal.

NEW REVELATIONS OF OUR TIME

*I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on
the earth beneath.*

ACTS 2:19

This quotation from Joel which is incorporated into the summary of Peter's sermon at Pentecost suggests in a vivid manner the new revelations of our time in the heavens and on the earth — in other words, in astronomy and economics. The fresh wonders in each realm have profound spiritual implications.

Consider first the events in the heavens — the breakup in this generation of the hard, cozy materialism, an inheritance

from the dogmatism of nineteenth century science, which, in the opinion of many, furnished such an ideal prison for man's mind and spirit. There is no more fascinating story in the whole record of man than that of the change in the concept of matter, beginning with the X-ray in the 1890's and still going on in the speculations and discoveries of astro-physics. And it doth not yet appear what we shall be. Hamlet's wish, "Oh that this too, too solid flesh would melt," has been abundantly granted. Matter has melted. It has been dissolved into equations and into energy represented by them. Spirit is no longer an exile from our world. This does not mean that any religious interpretation of the world has been established by science. It does mean, however, in a very definite manner, that the dogmatic barriers to a spiritual interpretation of the universe which existed in a confident materialism have been shattered. J. W. N. Sullivan puts this arrestingly: "The man who leaves no room for mystery in the universe, is not only not representing the point of view of science, but will soon be unable to understand it."

During the French Revolution Jean Bon St. André, the Vendean revolutionist, said to a peasant, "I will have all your steeples pulled down, that you may no longer have any object by which you may be reminded of your old superstitions."

"But," replied the peasant, "you can't help leaving us the stars."

There is more pertinence to religion in that old answer today than ever before, due to the new conceptions of the tenuous quality of star dust which the new physics has brought to our knowledge. We still have the stars, and the stars in their courses tell a fresh story of a universe in which the line between the material and the nonmaterial grows increasingly thin.

The new wonders revealed on the earth are likewise startling to anyone who will ponder them. One of those wonders

is the social validation of Christianity. The passing parade of life and history make more and more clear that Jesus was everlastingly right in his reading of life. Some of the most effective arguments for Christianity are not being spun out of the brains of theologians, but are being shaped by events of contemporary history, which bring daily testimony to the truth that other foundation can no man lay for lasting security, economic welfare and peace, than that which is laid in Christ Jesus. We are members one of another. The society which denies that essential unity starts on the road to disaster.

For generations we have accepted the conventional picture of Jesus as a gentle, mildly idiotic sentimentalist, a figure for poetry and art, unfitted for any contact with the rough realities of the world. That picture is steadily changing for anyone who is not utterly deaf, dumb and blind. Jesus is emerging as the sternest realist who ever injected hard truth into a world ruled by illusion. The sentimentalist at the Versailles Peace Conference, for instance, was not Jesus. The sentimentalists there were the romantic fools who imagined it possible to build security and peace on a basis of hate and revenge!

Gilbert Stuart, who painted so many portraits of George Washington that one wonders how either of them ever had time for anything else, once looked at Talleyrand, the French statesman, who was visiting America, and made the remark, "If that man is not a scoundrel God does not write a legible hand." God does write a legible hand. Sometimes he writes on a human face. Sometimes, as in our own United States at the present time, he writes on the face of the land. The succession of dust storms and floods, drought and erosion of the soil, is legible writing which tells us that whatever a man or a nation sows that shall it also reap. When for generations men have abused and exploited the land, slaughtering the forests and skimming off the topsoil, we pay for it in disaster. Such calamities are not, as our blasphemous phrase goes, "acts of God"; they are acts of man, of man's greed.

God writes a legible hand in the economic and international world. Jesus does not come into our world like a Rip Van Winkle, antiquated and alien in speech and garb. He comes offering the one way of life for our interdependent world, a way based on mutuality and common welfare; in religious terms, which are true in every realm, it is a way of love and brotherhood. Jesus stands in our world as the stone which is the head of the corner, "and whoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken."

The new wonders of sky and earth furnish the possibility of a new day of the Lord.

ACCENT ON YOUTH

Your young men shall see visions. ACTS 2:17

It is noteworthy that in the first recorded instance of Christian preaching there should be found, in the quotation from Joel, the mention of youth as receiving the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It was in some degree a forecast of the part that youth has played in the expansion of Christianity; a fitting expression of the real affinity which exists between the genius of Christianity and the distinguishing qualities of youth.

This reference to youth is particularly interesting in this decade of the twentieth century because of the striking change that has taken place in the common estimate of youth as in itself an instrument for "building a new world." Mere fewness of years is today not so generally accounted infallible evidence of wisdom as it was during the early 1920's. It was but natural that after a world war, whose origin was ascribed to the ineptitude and viciousness of elder statesmen, a far better order of things was looked for when the next generation took over the helm. A large multitude of young people, both those who served under arms and those too young to take part

in the conflict, felt betrayed, and rightly so. Many took to heart the counsel of James M. Barrie that they engage boldly in "the war with their betters," meaning by betters the elder generation responsible for the war.

But during the 1920's, when exaltation of youth was the rage, expectations were carried to a ludicrous extreme. Youth was smothered with fulsome flattery from pulpit and platform. The most amateurish work and adolescent thinking were tolerated and applauded if only youth were doing them.

All that has met a disillusioned reversal. There is no salvation to come automatically from those under twenty-five. It was idiotic that it should ever have been expected, even in the mood prevalent in the early post-war years. Today we see more clearly. The most malignant and dangerous cults in the world today have claimed with resounding success the fanatical loyalty of the younger people. The nazi and fascist states are upheld far more by youth than by maturity. Universities, not only in Europe but in America also, are crowded with devotees of romantic reaction.

We have clearly seen what happens to youth movements which capitalize largely on exuberance and enthusiasm without any core of definite idea. Someone comes along and puts a shirt on it and leads it off in a goose-step. H. G. Wells has drawn a true picture of this uncritical overestimate of youth and some of its results: "Adolescent mentality has had an opportunity to display itself since the war, as it has never had before in the whole history of mankind, and everywhere it has shown itself the same thing, violent, intolerant, emotional, dramatic, stupid, and blind to all the vaster intimation of the catastrophe. Everywhere it has rushed to follow extremest leaders and to follow them with a fierce devotion. The Communist party in Moscow is substantially youthful, and its devotees in Europe and America are rarely over thirty. The Fascist nuisance is its natural counterpart."²²

Yet it is no more the part of wisdom to disparage youth than it is to overestimate it. There is a real and deep relationship between the characteristic qualities of youth and the appeal of Jesus to men — the sitting lightly on convention, the response to daring, the readiness to adventure. Youth holds a threat to entrenched privilege, a threat expressed by Ibsen's Master Builder who confesses to "an overmastering fear of the young." Some day, he foresees, the new generation will come knocking at the door, and the prospect terrifies him, as well it might in view of all that he represents.

There is no greater disaster in all the long history of the church than that it has so often either smothered or kept in the dark background those aspects of the gospel which have an inherent and commanding appeal to youth with its love of risk, daring, sacrifice and its response to the lure of a great objective, and has put in the foreground a colorless mixed message compounded of docility, tameness, and lackluster routine. Jesus knew better than that: "If any man will come after me let him take up his cross and follow me."

If the church is to grip and hold youth, if, in the words of Joel, the spirit of God is to be poured out on our young so that they shall see visions, we must follow the wisdom of Jesus. We must present his cause as a great, costly but glamorous adventure.

CRUCIFIXION BY THE RELIGIOUS

Ye by the hand of lawless men, did crucify him.

ACTS 2:23

Very careful language is being used here. And daring language. This speech ascribed to Peter at Pentecost was delivered to an audience in which the majority were Jews. The

guilt of the crucifixion is put plainly and clearly on the Jews themselves, not on the Roman officials. The deed was actually done by the hand of lawless men, but the prime movers, the instigators, were Jesus' fellow Jews. They were men of the same religious inheritance and community with himself, men who had been brought up in the same tradition, revered the same prophets, prayed to the same God. They were the ones who might have been expected to receive him. Their guilt was the greatest of all; their blows were the deadliest of all.

There is a timeless truth in the charge. It is always the blow from the inside which is the most murderous. Christ in our own day is still crucified "by the hand of lawless men." But those most deeply guilty of that continuing Calvary in our modern world are found in the ranks of his own disciples. Our satisfaction with the less than Christian, our timidity in the face of the mob spirit crying, when the attempt is made to bring his spirit into dominance in our international and economic life, "Away with him," our half-way allegiance, our inertia in the presence of conditions which break the heart of God — these are the things which permit the repeated crucifixion of Christ. Rudyard Kipling has put it all in singing, searching words:

“ He that hath a Gospel,
To loose upon Mankind,
Though he serve it utterly —
Body, soul and mind —
Though he go to Calvary
Daily for its gain —
It is His Disciple
Shall make his labor vain.

“ He that hath a Gospel
 Whereby Heaven is won
 (Carpenter or Cameleer,
 Or Maya’s dreaming son),
 Many swords shall pierce Him,
 Mingling blood with gall;
 But His Own Disciple
 Shall wound Him worst of all! ” ²³

THE GLAD TONGUE

*I beheld the Lord always before my face, . . .
 therefore my tongue rejoiced.*

(American Revised Version)

My tongue was glad. *(Lake and Cadbury)*

My tongue exults. *(Weymouth)*

ACTS 2:26

We have been reduced to such a state by the cult of artificial gladness that the very words “the glad tongue” cause us to sink into profound gloom. What scorn is poured on gladness! To call a person a Pollyanna is to use a fighting word. One had better have his weapons ready. For a number of years, at least, the cult of aggressive and relentless gladness swept over our land like a chestnut blight. The word “glad-hander” was of necessity invented to describe the particular form of devastating cordiality employed by hotel clerks and other greeters. Many a man could face life with fortitude were it not for the chirping cheerfulness of his friends.

This revulsion from gladness is further accentuated by the fact that in many circles in which the chief and often only symbol of rejoicing is the cocktail glass, the only “glad” tongues are twisted ones, set babbling and wagging awry by alcohol.

We need a different word to indicate the type of gladness set forth here in the Book of Acts as a mark and an effect of religious experience. It is worlds away from the pumped-up and vociferous heartiness which has, for many, preempted the meaning of the word "glad." The words of the Revised Version, "rejoiced," and of Weymouth, "exults," catch its deep meaning more accurately. It is not a synthetic product; it does not originate on the surface of life; it flows naturally from deep springs.

The exultation which comes from "interior religion" finds the language of deep and permanent joy naturally and inevitably. The tongue speaks it because the heart and mind feel it, just as the diction of great poetry takes the form fitting to great content. Principal Sidney Cave of England has suggested the permanent highroad to gladness in his comment that nothing was more characteristic of the first preachers of Christianity than the note of awed surprise. "They could never," he writes, "get used to the wonder of the gospel nor to the wonder of the church."

The awed surprise which results from repeated realization of the reality of fellowship with a God of love who dwells at the heart of the universe makes the genuinely glad tongue. There is then no need for pumped-up gladness; the real thing wells up like a mountain spring from the deep.

WILL YOU LEAVE ANYTHING MORE THAN YOUR TOMB?

His tomb is with us unto this day. ACTS 2:27

Everyone leaves something to the world — his tomb. One question is suggested by this simple statement of Peter's concerning David that "his tomb is with us unto this day."

That question is, "Will you leave anything in the world when you depart from it, besides your tomb?"

David left a tomb. This remark of Peter's was undoubtedly an overstatement, in so far as any definitely known and located tomb of David was concerned; but it was perfectly true in that somewhere there was David's burial spot. David, however, left far more than a tomb. Disregarding the question of the authorship of the Psalms ascribed to him, we can say that he left to his nation a new coherence, the possibility of a new creation. He gave an impetus to the spiritual movement of the world, the effects of which can be felt to this day.

One thing is clear: selfishness rarely builds anything on the earth but a tomb. It is often an elaborate and costly tomb, to be sure, but still essentially a tomb. There is profound meaning to the gay and light and lilting little verse of Arthur Guiterman, entitled "The Complete Egoist":

"A mollusc who dwelt in primordial slime
Was always himself to the innermost core;
As being himself took up all of his time,
He never did anything more.

"Still just as he was, though long ages have flown,
He stands on the specimen-cabinet shelf
A fossil, immortal in durable stone,
A monument raised to himself." ²⁴

John Galsworthy has put the same truth, on a biological level higher than that of the mollusc, into the words of one of the Forsytes: "I have lived through everything but life." What an epitaph that is, in a deeper sense than the stolid Forsyte meant it!

Go into an executive session with yourself with this question as the order of the day, "What, exactly, will you leave, more than a tomb?"

There is a different question which also arises, "Do you possess anything of the great personalities of the past besides their tomb?" Is your relation to them that of a gravedigger or a spiritual heir? The grave-tending business has been a large occupation of men — and let us add, in reverent salute to the women's patriotic societies, a large occupation of women. Many busy members of the D.A.R., for instance, have decorated the tombs of revolutionary heroes, who would be utterly aghast at any present-day manifestation of the heroic devotion to civil liberty which made the graves worth remembering and decorating. They have inherited the tombs of Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Washington and Jefferson, but none of their spirit. "Hark, from the tombs a doleful sound" comes, a sound of perverted praise, which blindly seeks to use the prophets of yesterday to bind the life of today in a mummy case.

WORDS THAT CUT

When they heard, they were cut to the heart.

(Lake and Cadbury)

ACTS 2:37

What a superb word for a sermon — it "cut to the heart"! One outstanding impression which rises from reading in Acts of the effect of apostolic preaching is that of the violent vocabulary necessary to picture it. They are so often surgeon's words or swordsman's words, words that cut, stab, pierce. It is no mock battle which is described; the words were two-edged swords. Or, to use the language of surgery, the preaching was a major operation, not the soothing lotion. It was truth with a cutting edge, a pricking point.

Too often the words that are spoken in the pulpit are so

blunted that they do not cut anything. Joseph Fort Newton has a phrase to describe them. In a tribute to the preaching of John Kelman he writes, "There is no flowery emptiness in his preaching, no pious pap." "Pious pap" never cut anyone to the heart. John Wesley shows the same contempt for blunted truth when he writes of some Moravian preaching that it was "a luscious style of preaching. They feed their people with sweetmeats. They talk much of promises and little of commands."

Such lusciousness and pap are unpardonable in a Christian pulpit, for the Christian's native tongue has a vocabulary of sharp-edged words. The degeneration of a poet's (or a preacher's) words is pictured by Joseph Auslander in verses which use the very figure of speech employed in this description in Acts of the effect of Peter's sermon.

"There were words like dark wounds, words meeker
Than mercy, words blacker and bleaker
Than the Garden, the wine in the beaker,
The kiss like a livid scar;
There were words like a sweat, like spikes driven
Through the heart, like an evil forgiven,
And the scream that streaked blood across Heaven
From that mouth burnt with vinegar!

"But today every phrase that can flicker
With a firefly's wink finds its picker
In some little lyrical vicar
Who struts about puffed, self-appointed,
And chirps of a twig or a trouble
That is eating him up like dry stubble,
Or likens his love to a bubble
And deems himself darkly anointed." ²⁵

Our words become blunted when they have no concrete application. They are also blunted when they lack inner authority. There is real spiritual insight into the sources of the cutting sharpness of preaching in Louis Untermeyer's comment on Sara Teasdale, "Her later lyrics grew more and more straightforward, more dependent on an inner authority and less upon the clever manipulation of effects."²⁶ As preaching moves from "clever manipulation" to "inner authority" it cuts to the heart.

THIS CROOKED GENERATION

Save yourselves from this crooked generation.

ACTS 2:40

These words inevitably bring to mind a picture familiar to every century — that of a sour-visaged religionist bewailing the degeneracy of the times in which his lot has been cast. "These terrible times" is the burden of his woe. The unpopularity of religion in each oncoming generation has been due in part to the stridency, the bitterness and the dogmatic blindness of the phillipics launched by religion's representatives.

The remembrance of this sorry history should lead us to examine carefully the mood behind this passage from Acts. The words, "this crooked generation," may be the expression of one of the most pernicious mistakes of religious history, a sweeping, indiscriminating contempt for the ruling ideas and spirit, the new understandings and valuations of a whole generation. Or they may represent, as they do here and often have done, a prophetic insight into the forms of a generation's perverse thinking which may vitiate its greatest goods and achievements.

There are three reasons why we should hesitate even lightly

to indulge in the emotional luxury of damning our time as a crooked generation. One is that contempt for one's time is the easiest form of contempt into which one can fall. It is also the most futile. A second reason is that this vice is the peculiar liability of middle age and old age and few there be that escape it. It has an insidious way of presenting itself as an angel of light, as a mark of mature wisdom; but very often it is a mark of nothing but hardening of the arteries and rheumatism of the mind. Such typical "lambasting" of the young breaks down the bridge over which the assured values of one generation might pass over to the next. A third reason for guarding vigilantly against contempt of one's time is that such contempt is usually in truth a form of escape from the time's complexities and difficulties. It is far easier to inveigh against "this crooked generation" and shake its dust regally from one's feet, than it is to take an understanding part in its life, to recognize and conserve its good and struggle against its evil.

Yet when all this is clearly in mind, there remains in a deep and permanent sense the need for escape from one's own generation. Our minds need to flee from the crippling provincialism of one particular day and one particular situation into the general truth of all the generations; from the village of the merely timely into the universe of the timeless. For every generation, no matter how noble or distinguished, is a perverse one, because of the simple fact that it is a small part of an infinitely larger picture, all human nature and history. As someone has well said, an intense modernism is often merely provincialism transferred from the map to the calendar. Our thinking needs to be set in a long-time frame.

It is also true that our present generation may be called crooked or perverse, not in a spirit of dull-witted or aging contempt, but through the thoughtful insight which measures it by divine standards.

REPENT

Repent ye. ACTS 2:38

Here is the answer to the first question ever asked in the history of Christian evangelization. In brief the answer was, "Change your mind."

It is an answer both crucial and inclusive, but one which for us has lost its cutting thrust. The reasons for this loss are many, but three stand out among them. The first is that the word has been worn smooth through repetition, so that it can no longer startle or convict us. It has so often been lifted out of life into remote academic and theological realms, safely distant from today's decisions. In much preaching it has been made to mean, "get a new judicial status before God," rather than, "get a new mind for the direction of your life."

A second reason is that the word "repent" has far too exclusively been given a backward rather than a forward reference. Thus it ceases to be a power for changing the world. Émile Souvestre has summed up perfectly the backward tendency of the word "repent" in his cynical epigram, "Two-thirds of human experience are wasted in hesitation and the last third in repentance." But the Christian meaning of "repent" is not regret or remorse for the past; repentance looks to the future; it is the changed mind and the changed life.

A third reason for our ready escape from the compulsion to repent is that repentance is so desperately hard. A genuine "turning about," finding a new mind and a new direction, goes against our confidence in ourselves, or our self-esteem, against the basic assumptions of our lives, against our profits. Listen to a perfect expression of this attitude in a letter written by the mother of President Charles W. Eliot of Harvard to a friend who had joined the Episcopal Church: "Eliza, do you

kneel down in church and call yourself a miserable sinner? Neither I nor any member of my family will ever do that! ”²⁷ To that frank declaration of independence many will echo, “Never!” D. L. Moody has put the same feeling into words much quoted: “I have often heard good people say that our meetings were doing good, they were reaching the drunkards, the gamblers and the harlots; but they never realized that they needed the grace of God for themselves.”²⁸

Repentance is not merely an emotional convulsion. Indeed it may not be that at all. It is the acquisition of a new instrument for the directing of life, a new mind. It includes a new intellectual technique for the management of life.

“Fruits meet for repentance,” adequate for a Christian “turning about” in our day, include many attitudes of mind and life.

Among other things, they include a new training of the imagination, so that it may enable us to get out from behind the barricades with which we so easily surround ourselves. We need a new mind that will carry us into an understanding of the burdens which our present order of life lays on the shoulders of men, women, and children. Only thus will we be able to take a Christian part in lifting those burdens. Barricades in front of the mind and heart are an inevitable result of an age of specialization such as ours has come to be.

Gerald Heard has put this convincingly: “Most men may object to carrying on torture by scourging or to killing in cold blood a fellow creature, but modern state methods have so spread responsibility through specialization of function that no one feels the actual, crucial, compelling moral responsibility which says, ‘I have done this and I am guilty of a crime against my conscience.’ The judge and jury do not carry out or even see carried out the sentence; the prison officials do not have a word in inflicting the sentence. So, too, with the large-scale disasters and crimes of social life, the wars which torture

and execute communities — specialization has made everyone feel irresponsible. Since 1900 that specialization has grown to an almost insane degree. The politician drifts into war, the soldier carries out the sentence, priding himself that he is relieved of any responsibility for the 'dirty work of politics'; more, the chemist with metals, explosives, gas, makes the inventions which make war grow ever more the chief enemy of civilization, of which the pure researching scientist is one of the most wonderful and could be one of the most precious growths." ²⁹

A deepening of the sense of our personal share in social responsibility is a central part of repentance needed in today's world.

Another part of an adequate repentance is a sharing in the effort to extricate the church from its crippling alliance with the non-Christian institutions which hold our world in their grip, such as the industrial system and the capitalistic order, and our dominant vicious forms of nationalism.

All this means a real and costly change of direction. Our present directions lead to the steep cliffs of destruction. A pointed story told by Dr. Rufus Jones puts this right-about-face clearly. A foot traveler asked a youth he saw by the wayside for the location of a destination he wished to reach. He received this answer: "If you go on the way you are headed it will be about twenty-five thousand miles, but if you turn right-about-face it will be about three."

BUILDING A CREED FROM LIFE

And they continued steadfast in the apostles' teaching.

ACTS 2:42

Dr. F. J. Foakes-Jackson makes a suggestive comment on this first mention of the apostles' teaching in the Book of Acts.

He writes: "What is called the apostles' instruction (Greek, *didache*) proves the antiquity of the belief in the Christian church that its doctrine must be traced back to the Twelve, who were the immediate companions of the Savior. . . . It was assumed that the whole corpus of the teaching of the church was derived from that of the apostles during their sojourn in Jerusalem. . . . This fact also explains the idea of apostolic succession, and also of the Apostles' Creed, which a late legend explained as having been made by the Twelve when they left Jerusalem to evangelize the world, each contributing in turn an article of belief." ³⁰

This romanticized picture of each apostle contributing an article of belief to a creed is a fascinating one, not because it has the slightest basis of fact, but for its suggestiveness as to the way in which a living faith is made up from living experiences.

It is often forgotten that the earliest company of Christians did not start out with a formal or completed creed. It had none of the things we have been accustomed to think of as essential for the church — a building, or organization, or ritual, or creed. It had first of all an experience, and a fellowship built up around that experience. The things most surely believed were the things which appeared in lives. Hence the first designation of Christianity as "the Way." The faith which won and held men was the way people went, the way they lived in the new experience.

So it really was true that the resultant faith was made up of personal contributions from many lives. We can see the processes in action in the statement that beholders, when they noted the courage of the disciples, took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. Their courage was a personal contribution to the common faith. Others contributed their own individual addition or interpretation through a quality of behavior.

Two questions arise. The first is, What articles of faith does your life contribute to the common wealth of the Christian fellowship? The second is, How is the accumulation of spiritual capital in your particular church growing? Every organized church today has its formal creed and statement of belief. But it does not really live by that. A church lives, if it really lives at all, by the personal contributions which the lives of its members make to the common faith and experience.

Sheila Kaye-Smith has coined a fine phrase for this faith made up by each one's contributing an article of belief. She says, "It is possible in these days of Christian civilization to live a moral life without Christ, but we ought to be too proud to draw thus upon the bank of the saints."

"The bank of the saints" — that is the true capital of the church! Its spiritual resources, its sustaining creed, are made up of the separate deposits of Christlike lives. We are all continually drawing on the bank of the saints. Are we adding any new deposits?

BREAKING BREAD

And they continued steadfastly in the breaking of bread.

ACTS 2:42

On these words F. J. Foakes-Jackson comments: "Even apart from the Lord's Supper, the breaking of the loaf had a peculiar significance for the disciples of Jesus and a common meal, in which they believed themselves to be closely united to the Master, was partaken of by the Christian community from the first."⁸¹

These words open to us a glimpse of one of the greatest possible advances of Christianity in the next hundred years.

That advance is nothing less than the extension into the common life of the conception of the sacramental nature of bread. It is to surround and permeate the whole complex business of breadmaking, bread-winning and bread-distributing with the spirit of brotherhood. It is to grasp more deeply and largely the social message of the communion service, so that that service shall be a moving symbol of the mutuality of all breaking of bread, as a process of brotherhood in the spirit of Christ.

Bread is such an elemental fact of life. W. W. Gibson has caught the very rhythm of human life in his poem, "Daily Bread":

" All life moving to one measure —
Daily bread, daily bread —
Bread of life and bread of labor,
Bread of bitterness and sorrow,
Hand to mouth and no tomorrow;
Dearth for housemate, dearth for neighbor;
Yet, when all the babes are fed,
Love, are there not crumbs to treasure? " ³²

In this connection Dr. L. P. Jacks has said startling words. "Bread-winning and soul saving are not two independent operations," he says. "A civilization saves its soul by the way it wins its daily bread." And looking about us in many places we may well add, "A civilization damns its soul by the way it forces its members to win their bread."

Here for instance is a glimpse of this process of breadmaking as it was allowed to go on in Pennsylvania in 1933. The facts are taken from a government investigation. "Women testified that they earned in the Pottstown and Reading shirt factories from \$2.24 to \$6 for two weeks, working from seven A.M. to five-thirty P.M. daily. At Conshohocken a yarn mill pays employees wages as low as six cents an hour, out of

which they have to pay for their ice water. A textile company in Montgomery county deducts 25 per cent of the weekly wages towards the payment for stock in the company. A girl reported that she had made fourteen cents during one week, from which was deducted three cents for the stock subscription. At a Lebanon shirt factory a girl received \$2.73 for five and a half days, ten hours a day." ³³

What was needed there sorely was the sacrament of the Lord's Supper applied to all breadmaking. The communion service should be a symbol of the sanctification of agriculture and industry, a pledge that all meals which the millions eat of the bounty of God on this planet are holy meals. The processes of breadmaking and bread-sharing may be a true means of communion with God, if engaged in in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

John Bennett declares: "The prayer, 'Give us this day our daily bread,' means, 'Give us this day the brains and conscience so to organize our economic life that the bread which Thou hast already given us may not rot, but may be distributed to meet the needs of all the people.'" ³⁴

CHRISTIANITY AND COMMUNISM

All that believed were together and had all things in common.

ACTS 2:44

Few passages in the New Testament have suffered more from exaggerated and fantastic interpretation and analogy than this one. This record of the sharing of possessions, having all things in common, has been taken as a warrant for the assertion that Marxian communism is the one and inevitable economic expression of Christianity. With bland disregard of both the exact historical situation and the entirely changed

conditions of production and distribution in our modern world, the inference is drawn that here we have the first appearance of Marxian communism, and hence that it constitutes a literal model for Christianity everywhere and at all times. The validity of such an inference disappears on the slightest historical examination.

Our greatest danger in confronting this record is at the other extreme. Many today are so adept at refuting the charge that this early Christian practice was economic communism as we know it, that they escape too easily and thoughtlessly from the genuine implications of this expression of Christian love and brotherhood. We cushion our minds too readily against the logic of the Christian evangel. The crucial fact here is that the evangel did penetrate into the economic realm. The early Christians went as far as they could in the existing situation. There was no possibility of any common means of production. But within the bounds of their world and economic framework they went the limit.

There is in this historical event no literalist compulsion which sanctifies any particular economic order so that we can say, for all time, "This is the God-ordained system of economics, walk ye in it." Yet it does disclose a spiritual logic impelling the carrying of the spirit of love into the economic relationships of life. Unless the Christian spirit is so carried into the concrete relationships of life, it is fatally short-circuited.

It is also clear that in such an interrelated, machine-driven world as ours, that spirit of love and sharing, to be effective, must be carried much farther into the realm of ownership and production than it could be carried in the infinitely simpler economic framework of the first century. Nicholas Berdyaev has put the challenge which communism brings to Christianity in clear words: "Communism should have a very special significance for Christians for it is a reminder and denounce-

ment of an unfulfilled duty, of the fact that the Christian ideal has not been achieved. . . . Christian good has become too conventional and rhetorical and so the carrying out of certain elements of that good which is proclaimed in theory but very inadequately achieved in practice is undertaken in a spirit of terrible reaction against Christianity.”

REGULAR IN ATTENDANCE

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' fellowship.

ACTS 2:42

How we scorn regularity in these liberalized days! It is no longer a virtue with many of us; it is a vice. To be regular in anything, particularly in church attendance, seems to betray a cramping lack of imagination or of variety of interests. We boast that we live by the spirit, not by the letter. We leave regularity to the naïve, to the unsophisticated, to the benightedly orthodox. We know a trick worth two of that. We *select* our occasions!

But here, tucked away in the most suggestive explanation of the secrets of the apostolic church, is regularity of attendance. It is named first in the list of these secrets. They “continued steadfastly” (“devoted themselves,” Moffatt translates; Lake and Cadbury use the words, “regular in attendance”). What a dull anticlimax! Yet could it be that the first century has something to teach the twentieth in regard to the preliminary conditions of apostolic success?

Regularity of attendance is never an anticlimax. The appalling anticlimax to this picture of a growing church is the impotence of so many contemporary churches, with their flimsy undergirding of haphazard attendance, looseness of obligation, and specious disdain for “regularity.”

FROM BEGGING TO PRAISING

*Asked to receive an alms . . . and leaping up . . .
praising God.* ACTS 3:2-8

Here is a notable journey in religious experience, from begging to praising. When we first glimpse this lame man at the gate of the temple he is using the house of worship selfishly. It was a good post for individual advantage, a good place from which to get something for himself.

But as he passes out of the brief spotlight of history he is not merely in a different physical posture, but in an utterly changed spiritual posture. He is no longer begging; he is praising. Between the two there is a great gulf fixed. The gulf must be crossed if religion is to be a reality or a growing experience.

We see the contrast between begging and praising in the conception and practice of prayer. Prayer in so many lives never gets beyond the business of begging. In other words, it never really becomes Christian prayer. When prayer is used merely as a sort of beggar's whine it is prostituted to low ends. It is futile in so far as the transformations which can be wrought by prayer in personal life are concerned. The really great miracle in Christian experience is well pictured in the story of this beggar. He began with asking for his personal advantage; but he rose to worship.

This does not mean that personal petition has no valid and permanent place in worship. Jesus put the relationship of petition to praise with what ought to be unmistakable clarity. "Hallowed be thy name" — praise. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done" — dedication of life. Then comes, "Give us this day our daily bread" — personal petition in the mood of praise and for the ends of the kingdom of God.

Have we passed from begging to praising in our deepest,

most instinctive moods and attitudes? An arresting picture of the futility of the prayer which is mere begging is found in a scene in Maxwell Anderson's play, *High Tor*, where two men, to whom religion has been the emptiest of forms, are caught in a situation of real danger. The following dialogue ensues:

BIGGS. Say, do you know any prayers?

SKIMMERHORN. I know one.

BIGGS. Say it, will you?

SKIMMERHORN. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on.

BIGGS. That's not much good, that one.

SKIMMERHORN. It's the only one I know.

The peril continues, and the men return to the subject of prayer.

SKIMMERHORN. I don't know how to pray. (*A crash.*)

BIGGS (*on his knees*). O God, I never did this before and I don't know how, but keep me safe here and I'll be a better man. I'll put candles on the altar, yes, I'll get that Spring Valley church fixed up, the one that's falling down. I can do a lot for you if you let me live. O God — ³⁵

The worst of it is that this is not a caricature of prayer. It is a true transcript of millions of prayers — fixed at the begging stage.

We see the gulf also in the whole conception of religion. It is the difference between a valuation and experience of religion as something supremely worthwhile in itself — of God worshiped for himself, without regard to practical advantages — and a merely instrumental religion. One of the most insidious forces that corrupt genuine Christian religion is not anything

which comes as an onslaught from without. It is the widely prevalent idea of religion as an instrument for achieving some practical advantage. We are particularly exposed to this corrupting influence in these days when so much attention is being given to the psychological and physical benefits that derive from religious faith. Religion as a supreme and commanding experience gives way to religion as a means to another end — escape from worry, from sleeplessness, from indigestion, or from an inferiority complex. Henry C. Link's book, *The Return to Religion*, is badly flawed in this respect. It presents, amid a variety of wise counsels, a viciously instrumental conception of religion. Religion in that presentation is still more begging than praising.

A genuine faith does incontestably have beneficial results on mind and body. But when such results become the main purpose of faith, when faith is used as an instrument for the bringing about of secondary results, religion as life's highest experience is completely missed.

THE CHURCH'S GATE TO THE CITY

The door of the temple. ACTS 3:2

There has been much archaeological discussion concerning the exact identification and location of the gate to the temple here designated as the Gate Beautiful. And all the arguments are of little moment. Whether it was the Shushan gate — the external door on the east side of the temple area — or the Nicanor gate on the east side of the temple proper is a matter interesting chiefly to the curious or the excavators. There is a suggestion with a much more vital and contemporary bearing in the note which Josephus gives on the various temple gates. He says there were four gates leading to the city on

the western side, two to the northern suburb, a third leading to the king's palace, and a fourth leading to "the other city," down a great number of steps, then up to the city.

Hold the picture of those two doors of the temple in your imagination. They are thought-provoking symbols of the relationship of the church to the different forces and areas of its enviroing world. On the one hand, there is the gate leading to the king's palace, suggesting the relationship of the church to the dominant political and economic powers of the world. On the other hand, there is the gate to "the other city" where the mass of humanity dwelt amid squalor, suggesting the relation of the church to deep human need.

These two gates, opening on such different scenes, have been present throughout all history. The question always comes, in our day as in every other, "Which is the chief door?" To which door does the church pay the most attention — that leading to the seats of the mighty, or that through which it may hear the still sad music of humanity?

How much stealthy and insidious traffic has passed through the door of the church which leads to the king's palace, whether it be the palace of a powerful political monarch of the past or of one of the still more powerful economic overlords of our industrialized world! That door to the palace from the church was disastrously widened when Constantine, pretending to embrace Christianity, took over the church and began the long process of leading it captive in some imperial train. Consider the temple door to the king's palace in early Victorian England, when the church was so responsive to the dictates of the rising middle class industrialists and employers, so deaf to the bitter cry of the children. It seemed that the gate to "the other city" of human suffering was completely walled up with debris. Or consider a dark chapter of American history, the reconstruction days following the Civil War. Winfred E. Garrison in his *The March of Faith* makes it disturbingly clear that the door of the temple was very wide open

to the waxing industrial kings. He points out that the churches were most enthusiastic supporters of the military dictatorship over the south, which made it impossible for the agrarian south and west to come together against the industrialists and enabled the business interests to consolidate their rule. Another writer, Felix Morrow, dealing with the same period, says that "this support of what was essentially a dictatorship of the manufacturing class was but the prelude to the church's sanctification of the new masters. The epoch, since 1865, of the rise and maturity of modern capitalism, has been one in which the churches quite openly have been the handmaidens." ³⁶

If these words seem exaggerated, just watch today's intense conflict over the rights of labor, and understand the way in which multitudes within the church have been manipulated with propaganda and appeals to self-interest and emotionalized prejudice, so that they have become the mouthpieces of the owning classes and of economic reaction.

There are only two Gates Beautiful of the temple. One opens upward to God. The other swings outward to "the other city" of God's children, where they work, suffer and dream.

Open the gates of the temple!

LOOK ON US

*And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John,
said, Look on us.* ACTS 3:4

This command of Peter's represents a preliminary requisite of all really effective speech: concentration on the part of the audience. No man can serve two masters while he is listening to a speaker. Every speech carries implicitly this same command, "Look on us. Pull yourselves together." Public

speaking is a conspiracy not merely between the brain, the voice and the hands; the eye is an indispensable conspirator. The Ancient Mariner is a classic model for the speaker on any occasion — “He holds him with his glittering eye.”

But beyond this obvious meaning of Peter's words that seize the whole attention of the lame beggar is the suggestion in them of the truly terrible implication that what is said is checked up by what is seen. Every ideal recommended, every sacrifice called for, every action demanded, always carries the unspoken overtone, “Look on us.” If what one sees in the life of the impassioned exhorter clashes with the spirit or the content of the message, the words suffer a large subtraction. Subtraction is the terrible aspect of this universal truth. The unspoken inevitable “Look on us” often adds to rather than subtracts from the power of the message. A visitor to the music festival at Salzburg in Austria remarked that the music gained much in effectiveness from the beauty of the place. “The place is so beautiful,” she said, “that we interpret all that we hear in terms of what we see.”

That is a secret of the persuasiveness of Jesus. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. Men interpreted what they heard in terms of what they saw in his life. It is the secret of every persuasive life. It acts as a measureless asset to every word of testimony. The speech may limp and halt; the spirit and the life behind it with their “Look on us,” times without number have transformed it into flaming eloquence. George M. Lamsa writes: “In the early days the Christians in the east preached Christianity, not so much with pamphlets, lectures, books and conventions, but with enormous sacrifices and losses which they suffered in order to gain a convert. It was Jesus and his life which inspired early Christians and made them forget everything about themselves and sent them singing before the lions and the sword. At that time Christianity meant more than titles, choirs, organs and church buildings.”⁸⁷

We can never escape the words, "Look on us." We fairly shout them when we are least conscious of it.

Do they subtract or add?

AN UNTOLD STORY

And they took knowledge of him, that it was he who sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple.

ACTS 3:10

What happened to this lame beggar after he was healed? Did the rest of his life take on a new quality and goal as the result of his great experience? Or did he fizzle out in an anticlimax? What use did he make of the miracle performed on him?

It would be fascinating for a novelist to follow the later history of the many characters in the New Testament whose bodies and minds were restored, who were started out in life again with new powers and possibilities. Lew Wallace in *Ben Hur* has, of course, done exactly that in the case of one whom he pictures as being healed of leprosy by Jesus.

If we only knew the afterstories of this group of people, it would be a very provocative cluster of case histories for our study. Did this man, for instance, ever become a member of the Christian group? Did he ever grasp the larger meanings of the command, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk"? Were the restored powers ever used in a sense of dedication, kept alive with the remembrance, "Freely ye have received, freely give"? Or did that great experience just dwindle in the dull light of common day, forgotten in the new opportunities for economic advantage that were the result of his cure?

We do not know. Yet the questions move uncomfortably near to each of us. Those of us who have had some experience of the grace of God coming near to us, calling us out of our

darkness into his marvelous light — what about our years after that miracle of revelation? Did it throw its light on the afterdays, or has our dedication blinked out in the anticlimax of forgetfulness? Someone has said that “religions begin as the dawn of God and end with their backs to the wall.” Has that been the history of our religion — dawn blackened out, back to the wall?

The blind beggar’s afterlife is an untold story. Ours has been and is being recorded. What does it tell?

DENIED BEFORE THE FACE OF PILATE

Whom ye denied before the face of Pilate.

ACTS 3:13

This is a stinging phrase. And, of course, it raises the question of historical accuracy. To what extent were the Jews as a people responsible for the execution of Jesus by handing him over to the power of Rome? In these days when we see clearly the appalling results of anti-Semitism that question has assumed new importance. There have been fresh critical and historical explorations of the blanket charges against the Jews as the crucifiers of Jesus which are present in early Christian preaching. There have been in some Christians stirrings of a sense of guilt over the fact that the terrible load of oppression to which the Jews have been subject during the centuries was first begun by the rousing of feeling against them by the Christian teaching and preaching. The Gospel of John has been found to give explicit and repeated emphasis to this anti-Semitic feeling. Indeed, Hitler’s propaganda brigade have made use of this strain in John and exaggerated it for their own purposes.

Hostility to the Jews is expressed in Acts, however, as well as in John. And there has been general agreement

among New Testament scholars that these accusations are grossly unfair to the Jews, and have been a source of much injustice and suffering for them.

The forces which condemned Jesus to execution were the contemporary vested interests and hierarchy, rather than a people or race. Jesus clashed with the same entrenched powers of privilege with which his gospel has clashed ever since. His crucifixion was an example of a process very familiar, and one which had nothing to do with any particular race. It was the swift and brutal retaliation of a privileged group upon one whose teaching and action threatened the continuation of their profits and privilege.

Yet in the phrase used here, "denied before the face of Pilate," there is a true and sobering picture of an event which has happened again and again in Christian history and is daily recurring in our own time. Jesus and the causes he stands for, the things which he taught and for which he lived and died, have been denied (repudiated, Moffatt translates) before the face of Pilate; that is, they have been repudiated under the pressure which the ruling powers of the time have exerted. On some occasions "the face of Pilate" has meant the political power, as in the persecution under Nero and today's persecution under Hitler. Again and again under massive and cruel pressure Jesus has been repudiated by those who ostensibly owned him as Lord. Sometimes that power which causes the denial of Jesus is a social class; often it is the economic ruling group.

Pilate in every age distrusts the thinker. "We do not like to see a young man thinking," was the excuse the Austrian authorities gave for putting young Mazzini in jail. With these words they spoke for autocratic power everywhere and always. Under this *verboten*, Christian fortitude and integrity have broken times without number. There is a sad suggestiveness in Madelin's description of the bent backs of the French nobles in the days of Louis XVI. "The nobles in the

time of Louis XVI," he writes, "had been broken of the habit of energy and care had been taken not to train them in politics. They had been so bowed down that some of them had preserved and could not rid themselves of the physical attitude of obeisance."²⁸ The church, too, has often shown the fatal hump in the back which is the sign of obeisance to the Pilate of the time.

Martin Luther wrote, "Pilate took our Savior Christ to be a simple, honest, ignorant man; one, perchance, come out of a wilderness; a simple fellow, a hermit who knew or understood nothing of the world or government." If such was the judgment of Pilate on Jesus, he was colossally wrong. Yet many of Jesus' disciples have played up to that grotesque picture. They have accepted the role of simple, ignorant persons, who would never dare to question the dictates of the state. A startling example of this cringing obeisance to Pilate in our own day is the glowing tribute given to Hitler at the Oxford Conference of world Christianity in July, 1937, by Dr. F. H. Otto Melle of the German Methodist Church.

It is no light thing to face Pilate. For everyone who stands today in that difficult and perilous tribunal there should be deep and active sympathy. But then, discipleship was never advertised by its Founder as an easy thing. He used a blunt word in describing it — "cross."

KILLING THE PRINCE OF LIFE

Killed the Prince of life. ACTS 3:15

How subtly and unconsciously it can be done — killing the Prince of life! "Guide of life," Weymouth translates the phrase, bringing into view a supreme service of Jesus to human life. It is so easy to put the guide of life to death, to give

Jesus, as a shaping, directing influence in life, a premature but effective burial.

We can do it by burying him absent-mindedly, under a clutter of interests, all of which are given the precedence accorded to "must" legislation by a legislative assembly with a crowded schedule.

We can frame him as a religious picture in the hallway of our lives, a beautiful, gracious decoration, but rarely noticed.

We can make him a constitutional monarch, smothering him with all the trappings of royalty, but denying him all real power, until he becomes as futile a figure as King Victor Immanuel of Italy at the present time.

We can bind him into a book of history. In the British Museum there is stored away a phonograph record of a speech broadcast to the British empire by King George V on Christmas day, 1933. The record has been specially prepared so that it will be usable five thousand years hence. Meanwhile it is interred in a museum. So have the speeches of Jesus been laid away by many in a vault of history.

The Prince of life — is he alive in our world?

OFFICIALDOM'S FEAR OF AN IDEA

The priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being sore troubled because they taught the people. ACTS 4:1-2

Here was the officialdom of Jerusalem, "sore troubled" at the advent of a new teaching. Officialdom spends a good deal of its time in a jitter. It easily gets sore troubled by any movement it does not itself start, in whose words it does not hear continually the reassuring click of its own stereotypes.

History repeats itself, certainly when its pages recount the

sore trouble of the officials of every realm and age over a new idea. For one thing, officials as a group have learned to distrust ideas, except the petrified ones which form the basis of their authority. Ideas already solidified into supporting precedents — yes, by all means! But ideas in horrible, vulgar, squirming aliveness — good Lord deliver us!

As a vivid example of sore troubled officialdom, consult the story of the British high military command's reaction toward every new invention produced during the World War, as it is told in tragic detail by Liddell Hart, Lloyd George, and many others. Hundreds of thousands of men were needlessly slaughtered because of the fear of the brass hats at headquarters of a new military idea. General Haig's monumental stupidity in his aversion to tanks is only one of many such blunders. H. B. Liddell Hart says that there is only one thing harder than getting a new idea into the military mind; that is to get an old one out of it.

Officialdom in the church has the same fear of new teaching which involves adjustment to new conditions. Canon R. H. L. Sheppard of St. Paul's Cathedral says that the church has "missed the bus" on three of the crucial issues of the time — sex, war, and industry.

The priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees were running true to form in being sore troubled, "highly incensed."

One result of pondering upon this episode of Christian history ought to be a sobering realization of the habits of mind which are likely to fasten themselves on anyone who occupies an official position of any sort. For the way of an official is perilous.

THE RESURRECTION A POLITICAL HERESY

*Being sore troubled because they proclaimed in Jesus
the resurrection from the dead.* ACTS 4:2

It is truly startling to be told by so eminent a New Testament scholar as Dr. F. J. Foakes-Jackson that the preaching of the resurrection was at the very beginning a political heresy rather than a merely religious one. Peter and John were arrested for disturbing the peace, not for proclaiming unorthodox religious teaching.

This observation may well serve to remind us that the resurrection of Jesus, with all that it implies as to the value of human personality, is today and always has been a profoundly heretical and subversive doctrine in an unchristian political and economic order. Dr. Foakes-Jackson makes clear the basis of his contention. "The high priest was in charge of the temple. Seeing an excited crowd surrounding Peter and John, he had full authority to interfere, and accordingly he placed the two apostles under arrest. The subject of their preaching was a matter for his cognizance, since they were proclaiming a doctrine, in his opinion, highly dangerous, to both peace and orthodoxy. To him and his associates resurrection was not to be taken in our sense of the word. To the modern Christian it means that there is a future life in which men will be held responsible for their actions on this earth. To the Jews at this time it meant imminent world catastrophe, in which the powers on earth would be destroyed and a new order miraculously set up. To the priesthood a future life might be a matter of opinion, for on this point Judaism was not usually fanatical; but the resurrection implied political disturbance, of which they were most apprehensive, especially if it was to come very soon, and this was assured by the triumph of Jesus over death. Moreover, to the temple au-

thorities Moses meant the *status quo*, and Jesus, a new prophet like unto Moses, meant a revolution. No wonder the priests instantly stopped the preaching of this new gospel." 39

"The resurrection implied disturbance." It did; and it does. The resurrection of Jesus, preached with a sense of the valuation which assurance of the soul's eternal worth puts upon man, is a disturbing doctrine to a regime like Hitler's or Mussolini's or to any state which runs roughshod over people, regarding them merely as pawns of the state. The Christian view of man is a heresy of the deadliest sort to all totalitarianism, to all exploitation, to all injustice, to all race oppression. It is a heresy to the economic reaction which insists on placing profits and things above men. If the resurrection is heresy today in Berlin and Rome it is also heresy in the sore spots of our industrial areas, such as East Chicago, Youngstown, Ohio, and Weirton, West Virginia.

The fact that the heretical implications of the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus are so often not recognized or even suspected is testimony to the vagueness and remoteness, the aloofness from the central issues of our civilization, with which that doctrine has often been preached. Nothing more salutary to the church could happen than the arrest of a large number of preachers for "proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead."

Such preachers would be in a noble succession.

LOCK IT UP TILL TOMORROW

*And they laid hands on them and put them in ward
unto the morrow; for it was now eventide. ACTS 4:3*

Two things come immediately to mind in connection with this overnight imprisonment of Peter and John. They are

both instances of what might be called universal tendencies. We are struck by the effort of the authorities to imprison ideas. It has always been a delusion of threatened power and privileges to imagine that a fermenting idea can be securely locked up. That delusion has contributed much to the world's progress, for jails have in all the centuries proved to be the most favorable places for intellectual and spiritual fermentation that have ever been devised.

This action is also an instance of the easiest way of dealing with any problem — put it off till tomorrow. Lock it up overnight. Get it out of sight.

In this instance, the put-it-off technique was used by the enemies of the good news. But just as often — and more disastrously — the technique has been employed by its friends. It is a rare Christian gathering, be it conference, council or convention, which does not have in it some Nestor who has gained his reputation for wisdom by always arising, when a vote seems imminent, and saying in solemn tones: "Brethren, I yield to no man in my devotion to the cause behind this motion. [Pause, to insure a holy hush.] But this is not the opportune time to press this matter, nor is this the right method. I move that we postpone this matter till next year's session." The effect of such profound wisdom is frequently so great that Nestor is elected a moderator or bishop and given greater opportunities for pious obstruction.

There has been no more effective weapon in all the devil's armory than this suave doctrine of "the unripe time"; no more effective way of blocking the kingdom of God than the evasion of "putting it off till tomorrow." So readily is the gospel locked up in a moratorium, "for it is now eventide" and the light of truth is dimmed by gathering clouds. We do it with war. We do it in times of industrial strife. Men say — not often bluntly, but under cover of high-sounding devotion to "law and order," "This is no time to insist on civil liberties. Let's lock it up till tomorrow."

Against this frustration of God's good news by obstruction and postponement stands a very effective little word, frequently found in the New Testament: "Today."

THE UNHOLY ALLIANCE

Their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; and Annas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas, and John and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest.

ACTS 4:5-6

The music to the libretto of these two verses might very appropriately be the raucous strains of "Hail, hail, the gang's all here." For that is what this company was, the ruling gang of Jerusalem. It was an alliance of the religious and economic overlords, gathered to suppress the spread of a teaching and the growth of a movement which threatened the perpetuation of lucrative privilege. It was what such a coalition for such a purpose always is, an unholy alliance.

This sounds, on the face of it, so much like the violent reading into an ancient situation of the terms of the vastly different conflicts of today that it is necessary to cite New Testament scholarship in support of the interpretation. The real parallel to the power and interests of the chief high priests is found not so much in present-day ecclesiastics as in present-day economic rulers. Lake and Foakes-Jackson are very explicit on this point. They say: "The high priests were an economic order; members of families intermarried, and formed an inner circle of priestly houses among themselves. The immense wealth of the temple was in their hands, and they controlled monopolies in connection with the sacrifices, forming a close corporation. These chief priests were the real

rulers in Jerusalem. Even Josephus, who belonged to this order, testified to their rapacity and arbitrary acts.”⁴⁰

What a contemporaneous sound some of the words in this quotation have — “economic order,” “inner circle,” “immense wealth,” “monopolies,” “close corporation,” “rapacity and arbitrary acts.” They fit quite neatly into today’s newspaper headlines. Those who belonged to this high-priestly crowd were emphatically the economic royalists of their day and nation. Foakes-Jackson adds to the picture of this alliance between religion and economic exploitation: “The procurator and Caiaphas seem to have gotten on excellently, both being opportunists, whose actions were determined by considerations of expediency rather than justice or morality. At any rate they worked together and kept Judea in comparative peace for ten years. Annas seems to have acquiesced in this arrangement, and reaped his reward in exercising great authority as a recognized leader of the priestly rulers.”⁴¹

The alliance of religion with profit-making privilege is a spectacle often witnessed. In the prospectus issued by the London Company appealing for funds to exploit Virginia in 1606 the claims of patriotism, religion and profit were combined.⁴² How often have those three appeals been intertwined, the first two impressed to support the third — profit! Stephen Spender, in an impassioned poem, cries out against the church’s “blocking the sun.” Sometimes the church does block the sun of a new and fairer day for humanity — for instance, when it allows itself to become a chaplain for business powers. The danger of such a role today is not that of an official divided between religion and profit-making, as was the case in the court before which Peter and John were brought; it is the more insidious danger which comes partly from a childish lack of realistic economic understanding on the part of both ministers and members, partly from undis-

ciplined emotions which make people a ready prey for hysteria, partly from their being victimized by catchwords and stereotypes cleverly used by propagandists for reactionary interests. Sometimes, of course, such an alliance comes through fear of losing financial support. But whenever it is brought about, with religion supporting the exploiting forces, it is always an unholy alliance, as it was in Jerusalem.

THE POWER TO MAKE THE WORLD ASK QUESTIONS

By what power, or in what name, have ye done this?

ACTS 4:7

All through the centuries there has been much sighing for a reappearance of the "gifts" of the apostolic age. The "gift of tongues" has had an unending fascination for many in different centuries; and the effort to reproduce the phenomena attendant upon the gift has always resulted in the sort of unintelligent babble against which the apostle Paul protested so earnestly in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. Again, there have been endless efforts to reproduce healing by faith and the laying on of hands.

Of all the gifts of first century Christianity, the one most worth earnest effort for recovering it is that pictured in this conversation, the power to make the world ask questions. Here is a group of men so astonished at the disciples' deeds that there is wrung from them involuntarily the amazed question, "By what power or in what name have ye done this?"

That power to throw the world into a state of questioning was a secret of the growth of the apostolic church. It is the basic secret of what power the church has had in any age. When it loses that power, it goes into spiritual bankruptcy. It was not by physical miracle that the Christian church of

the first centuries made its deepest impression on the world. It was by moral and spiritual achievement. The oft-quoted comments of onlookers point to that fact: "Heavens, what women these Christians have!" "How these Christians love one another!" That was something so genuine, so self-evident, that questions were wrung from the beholders, who were forced to look for adequate sources of power for such results.

As we think of possible recoveries of this apostolic gift, we discover much material for an answer in the very record of Peter and John before the high priests in Jerusalem. We see impressive evidence of what it is that raises questions — a magnificent stubbornness, hearts possessed by a great affection and minds directed to a clear purpose, a liberating fearlessness.

We are compelled to ask ourselves, Has anyone been forced to ask questions about us? Has there been anything in our lives concerning which men ask in wonder, How does he do it? Is there anything in us not easily explained without calling in divine resources? It is a crucial matter, for Christianity has spread and endured largely because, beneath all the fluctuations of time and circumstance, this impression has been made on men by Christian lives.

There are two sorts of wonder about lives and their achievements. The first is caused by what persons *are*; the second by what they *do*. Genuine Christianity has a question-compelling power in both these respects.

Wonder is stirred by a quality of spirit. That quality is expressed in action, but it is more than a sum of acts. Sir Norman Angell once introduced a friend, Harold Wright, in this fashion: "This is Harold. He doesn't do anything. He just is." There are many people to whom that might be the highest tribute. Beyond what they *do*, they *are*. Indeed such is a real part of the impression which Jesus makes on the world. The lasting amazement is caused by people who *are*. Such quality of spirit makes itself felt in the very

atmosphere. Someone has truly said, "It ought to be as impossible to forget that there is a Christian in the house as it is to forget that there is a boy of ten in it." That is a hard test. But Christianity has endured in part because there are multitudes of people who do just that — make it impossible to forget that there is a Christian in the midst.

Wonder is also stirred by deed. "By what power, or in what name" — if this question is to echo through the world in amazement, it will be because of the expression in action of the inner spirit. So-called Christian nations do not throw the world into a state of questioning by any miracles of resistance to the war spirit and system. Christian churches, alas, do not do it in any arresting way either. The recovery of a question mark is a first item on the churches' order of business.

CINDERELLA

He is the stone which was set at naught of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner.

ACTS 4:11

Literary students tell us that one of the few original story plots of the world is that of Cinderella. It reappears among all peoples and in many forms. It is essentially the story of the rejected stone, which, by a strange romance, becomes the very head of the corner. It is the story of the ugly duckling which grew into the beautiful swan, the girl in the cinders who became the princess. Its place in the world's story-book rests ultimately on its sure place in human experience.

Here in the address of Peter to the high priests, in a quotation from the one hundred and eighteenth Psalm, that plot is brought into use as a figure of speech interpreting the place of Jesus in history. He is the stone, dismissed with contempt

by the authorized builders, destined to emerge as a keystone of the world's structure.

We today have a vantage point from which to view this claim, far different from that of anyone in the first century. Those who first made the claim looked forward in faith. We must continue, of course, to do that, to look into the future with the eyes of faith. But we can also do what no first century Christian could do, look back on nineteen hundred years of history. That backward look gives many strange evidences that history is something of a Cinderella story. The world's real progress, economic and political as well as moral and religious, for they are all tied in together, is often laid on a foundation of rejected stones. Ways of life which deny fundamental principles of Jesus do not last as secure foundations of the world's life.

Men have a convenient way of sorting out those facts of history and experience which show the triumph of the mailed fist, of far-reaching greed, of contempt for morality, and displaying them and saying, "That's the kind of world we live in." History, ancient, modern and contemporary, has a postscript to add to that judgment. We see a world in which power in itself defeats itself, greed in itself overreaches itself; in which in a long-time aspect the world is loaded against injustice and brute power used brutally. We see a world in which, actually, the battle is not to the strong nor the race to the swift. That's the kind of world we live in!

A remark once made about Coleridge throws light on the relation of Jesus to the world's welfare. A critic has said, "Wherever we seek to go in criticism we always meet Coleridge coming back." It is true that wherever we go in the study of human relationships we always meet Jesus coming back.

Look at one chapter, now being written in large capital letters, in the story of the stone which is the head of the

corner. We have been given a fresh demonstration of the truth that whatsoever a man soweth or a nation soweth that shall they also reap. Our world pays a penalty for the sin of greed; no matter with what contempt Jesus has been rejected by the land exploiters and wasters, that penalty is being paid. Here is the way an expert joins morality and economics and geology — Dr. Paul Sears. He says:

“The sins of our fathers are being visited upon the heads of their children. The raging waters of today are the price of waving fields of grain, of forests destroyed, of roads and cities thrown together with no far-seeing plan. To an eye trained to read the landscape, this tragic disaster of flood has but one meaning. Our continent is sick. The floods of today boiling over a land stripped of its cover and so robbed of its moisture that wells must sink from twelve to sixty feet deeper than ever before to strike water. This land is covered by a network of highways which defy natural drainage patterns. How far must suffering and misery go before we see that even in the day of vast cities and powerful machines, the good earth is our mother and that, if we destroy her, we destroy ourselves?”⁴⁸

This old Cinderella truth of the gospel, as we observe it in actual history, gives hope for the long view and the long effort. “In due season ye shall reap if ye faint not.” That’s the kind of world we live in.

A CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

*And they called them and charged them not to speak
at all in the name of Jesus.* ACTS 4:18

The word uttered here is one to which the ears of the church have become well accustomed — “Hush! Hush!” To

prevent the matter from spreading any farther the ruling order commanded, "Don't mention the name of Jesus." They organized a company to silence the name. Forcible suppression of the name and teachings of Jesus has always been difficult. It has always brought suffering and death. It has never been ultimately effective for its purpose. Indeed it is a grave question whether efforts from outside to put a stop to speaking in the name of Jesus have been as effective as the conspiracy of silence which the churches have often themselves entered upon. The outward suppression is difficult; the inward suppression is disastrous.

Suppose a great command went out from all the ruling powers of the world today not to teach in the name of Jesus — to put a moratorium on his ideas. Could it be more subtly effective than the present conspiracy to soft-pedal many of Jesus' fundamental challenges to the dominant ideas and codes of our world, a conspiracy which is evidenced in many persons within the church, both in its official leadership and in its ranks? So often the undeclared policy is to "prevent the matter from spreading farther" when the matter in question is forthright Christian warfare against anti-Christian forces.

How many striking instances there are of this attitude in the daily unrolling of history. There is the frequent tacit agreement, "Let's not have the principles of Jesus brought into the discussion of the major sins of our day. Let's not mention the name." For instance, at the conclusion of the Italian rape of Ethiopia the head of one great branch of the church, the pope, addressed his hierarchy on the subject of "the evil customs of the world." Did he dwell on the vicious "evil custom" of unprovoked assault on a weaker nation? On the evil customs of massacre and looting? Not at all. He did not speak in the name of Jesus about such unpleasant affairs. Instead, he held forth engagingly on "increasingly frightful customs" in the guise of "art, amusement and modernity."

“They insinuate,” he said, “dangerous germs into the people which attack the sobriety of customs, the observance of divine and human laws, the sanctity and fecundity of the family, and the innocence of youth.”⁴⁴ Here is a powerful Christian dignitary with no word about the slaughter of the sons and daughters of God; he is agitated chiefly about “fecundity,” a preachment that fits in superbly with Mussolini’s need of more cannon fodder with which to carry on looting and massacre. There was a man swallowing a camel!

Now of course the command of entrenched power to Christians to cease teaching Jesus’ principles in his name is a serious matter. Today, with the new political inquisition in Germany before our eyes, we can understand better than for centuries the days of early Christian persecution. Luther’s great hymn has been sung with deeper feeling than for long stretches of time. How timely and appropriate the words:

“For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe.
His craft and power are great,
And armed with cruel hate
On earth is not his equal.”

Nothing is sufficient as an arm against that opposition but the faith expressed in the hymn:

“God’s truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.”

Yet it is also true that the silence imposed from within is a greater calamity to the Christian evangel than that imposed from without. Insidiously, the teaching of Jesus is muffled at the behest of “good taste” and moderation. In many circles, to have a semblance of religion is emphatically good form; to take it really seriously—that just “isn’t done.”

The ceremonies, the upholstery, the trimmings of religion — yes! But the heart of the thing, that which comes in the name of Jesus with its unequivocal demands, with the inevitable cost of conflict — “Let’s keep the matter from spreading that far!”

THE PATRON SAINT OF LIARS

Ananias . . . sold a possession, and kept back part of the price. ACTS 5:1-2

Perhaps it would be more exact to call Ananias the patron saint not merely of liars, but of “double entry bookkeepers,” using that term in the sense of ethical judgment — those who in the book of their affairs keep one page for the stark realities and another, a much more beautiful one, for show purposes. For Ananias was not merely a liar. His distinction comes from the fact that he was a liar of a particular variety and for peculiar reasons. He wanted the prestige of generosity without being willing to pay the price. It is in the particular reasons for his pretense that one of the most important lessons for every age lies.

That aspect has been obscured to a large degree by the story of the spectacular wonder of the supposed punishment of Ananias by swift death. The purpose of the story as told in Acts seems, in part at least, to be to show the wonder and awe which seized the onlookers. But the words of Peter reveal a sure ethical and religious insight into the quality of the dishonesty displayed by Ananias. Peter points out that the property was Ananias’ own. He was under no compulsion to give it all. He wanted the prestige of being a partaker in the sharing of the Christian community, but at a bargain price.

The whole episode has much to say on the relation of Christian faith to bookkeeping. It bears directly on the modern tribe of Ananias, those who have one system of bookkeeping for publicity purposes and another for the realities which are too raw to be published without loss of face. Some of the deadliest dramas come from just that — evil realities covered up with the plaster of show-window publicity.

This ethical double-entry system covers such widely separated actions as that of a man who makes a gift to charity amid resounding publicity and thinks thus to take off the curse of a thorough selfishness; a Mussolini who barks loudly of his devotion to peace while making murderous war on Spain; an employer who fights labor tooth and nail but lays claim to ethical respectability because his heart is devoted to a man's "right to work without the dictation of an alien organizer."

Ananias, ancient and modern, is a typical romantic in that he is strong in language and weak in character.

SAPPHIRA

Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it.

ACTS 5:1

The language of the writer of the Book of Acts makes perfectly clear the participation of Ananias' wife, Sapphira, in his deception and her share in the guilt. Moffatt translates the last clause of Acts 5:1, "with the connivance of his wife"; Weymouth says, "with her full knowledge and consent."

Theodore Roosevelt during his presidency did much for the fame of Ananias. Whenever Mr. Roosevelt wished to deny a statement, his procedure was to nominate the author

for membership in the Ananias Club. This custom of his sent many reporters to their Bibles, and in a real way rescued Ananias from the dusty tomb of history and made him a living citizen of the twentieth century. The Ananias Club enrolled a large membership.

No one has ever founded a Sapphira club. Perhaps that restraint has been due to chivalry or courtesy. Yet Sapphira is a far more characteristic figure in human experience. And a larger share of evil and guilt attaches to her for hers was the crime of "connivance and consent." Sapphira was not the master-mind in the scheme. She was not "the boss in the back room," not the chairman of the board, not the spider who spun the web. She merely knew and consented. She did not stop it or try to stop it; she "let it ride."

The people who know and consent to evil do far more to make possible and perpetuate evil than the inventive mind which originates it. For those who contribute their consent — or their indifference, which amounts to the same thing — so far outnumber the positive engineers of evil that their connivance is the ultimate reason for the extent of evil. The ancient and dishonorable order of Sapphira holds the world back from moral advance by the stout chains of consent. The word "Sapphira" literally means "beautiful"; the indifference of the consenting Sapphiras is literally the ugliest thing in the world.

The clearest instance of this attitude is seen in connection with war. The strangle hold of the war system on the neck of the world is not kept tight so much by evil political or diplomatic Ananiases as by the millions of Sapphiras whose full knowledge and consent make it impossible for the world to wrench itself free. There is no more trite remark today than that the people of all the nations want peace. Of course no one outside of an insane asylum wants war. Yet millions among the people perpetuate war, not by demanding it,

but by consenting to conditions and aims which make war inevitable. Such connivance takes the form of indulgence in the fever of nationalism and delivering the minds in bondage to hysterical emotions. It takes the form of devotion to the profits of trade, come what may in the pursuit of the dollar. It is that elevation of profits above peace, above life, above national welfare, that threatens to ruin any effort to secure peace through neutrality laws. Within recent months we have seen only too clearly the frantic and blind devotion of business groups, in America and Europe, to the profits of foreign trade, even though such profits promise surely to carry the nation down to disaster. Sapphira consents, thinking, "I'll save my own pile, and that's what I care for."

No message is more urgently needed today than that which will bring men to consciousness that they bear personal guilt for war because they share in the communal sin of attitudes and desires which inescapably perpetuate war. If we each individually would just look long and deeply enough at one boy slaughtered in war, and follow back the causes of that murder, we would find the trail of guilt leading to ourselves.

We become Sapphiras by a habit of thinking in which uncritical loyalties and prudent hesitations overbalance the sure ethical judgments of a mind allowed to operate freely and without pressure. How many political Sapphiras there have been in our history, men of mature moral understanding who nevertheless stood by at lying schemes like that of Ananias. Of a man of so many high qualities as John Hay, a biographer is forced to write: "His party loyalty which resembled that of a highly cultivated churchman for his church kept him a silent spectator to the betrayal of principles in which he believed."⁴⁵ This comment is in connection with Hay's complaisance, as secretary of state, at President Roosevelt's scheme of wrenching Panama away from Co-

lombia by means of a manipulated "revolution." Hay played Sapphira to Roosevelt's Ananias. (Incidentally, what a terrible phrase — terrible because so often true, in an immoral sense — "the loyalty of a highly cultivated churchman to his church"!)

The Sapphira mentality also rises from a preference for peace and comfort to the disturbance and risk of opposition to strong forces of evil, swift and powerful to retaliate.

"TWO HEADS AND BETTER THAN ONE"

*Sapphira, his wife . . . with her full knowledge
and consent.* ACTS 5:2

"The saddest are these:
It might have been."

This is one of the many passages in the Bible where we can get a bit more deeply into the real values of the story by the employment of the magic word, "Suppose." Suppose Ananias had had a different sort of wife. Suppose that instead of being a consenter, and evidently a sharer of his cupidity, she had been a questioner. Suppose there had been two heads instead of one in the Ananias family. It opens up a question of first and lasting importance — what Sapphira might have been and done as a wife.

The real tragedy of many a marriage lies in just what is often cited as the real glory of marriage — "two minds with a single thought." That is precisely the trouble. Marriage comes to a finer issue when there are more thoughts than one. To "the marriage of noble minds" one thought is an impediment. The question, Where did Sapphira fail in the highest offices of love? is a fruitful theme for thought and for provocative preaching.

In one sense of the word, and the worst sense, Sapphira was an old-fashioned wife; that is, she had no mind of her own. She failed to perform her part in an enterprise which by its very nature, if it is to be a success, must be one of mutuality. By exercising the right and duty of challenge by another mind she might have changed a sordid disaster into noble history.

The survival of the Sapphira tradition, in which all the thinking is done by the lord and master while the wife merely "consents," is responsible for much of the inertia of the world.

Sapphira's wifeness suffered from premature and superficial loyalty to her husband. Those are root causes of the failure of many marriages to reach the high mark of their calling. Sapphira's loyalty was premature in that it was given to the man as he was at the moment, and not to the man he might become, whole-minded instead of double-minded. It was a superficial loyalty in that it was not given to the deepest in him. For very evidently something fine and genuine in him had responded to the appeal of the Christian teaching and fellowship. That capacity, deep within him, might have been cherished and nourished to expression, so that the name of Ananias might have become a noble memory, like that of the other Ananias who welcomed Paul into the Christian way. Instead it became a hissing for all the centuries.

What is the highest service in marriage? It is love and loyalty to the deepest and highest in the other — a demanding love which holds one up to his best when to slide to the lowest is so much easier; the critical opposition, from faith in the best, to whatever is less than the best. In failing of this service, the wife so often becomes an evangelist of the cult of the mediocre. Two keen writers have within the last year pictured this liability in sharp phrases. Josephine Lawrence, in *The Sound of Running Feet*, says of one woman,

“She was destined to shop for cheap values.” Zona Gale in *A Light Woman* says of another, “She unerringly celebrates the mediocre.” Both evidently were children of Sapphira.

A Christian marriage was that of Samuel Barnet and his wife Henrietta, out of whose mutual challenge to the best came the first social settlement in England. These two, linked in a conspiracy for the best, “shone in the gray twilight of Whitechapel like two flaming spirits bound into one fierce blazing torch.”⁴⁶

NONE DARED TO ATTACH THEMSELVES

But of the rest durst no man join himself to them

ACTS 5:13

There are a fine sound and flavor to this old word, “durst.” The dictionaries tell us that it is archaic — an archaic form of the past tense of “dare.” That is a pity. It is too good a word to become archaic. It has a robust quality, almost a swashbuckling gusto, that should not be lost to the spoken language. We get its full flavor in Bunyan’s, “I wondered whether I durst and I found that I durst.”

Yet it is a loss much greater than that of a picturesque word when the thing itself becomes archaic, when a forthright quality of daring drops out of life.

Here in the first epoch of Christian history is the mention of a crowd of people who “durst not” join themselves to the disciples. Why not? What fears held them back?

If we look for an answer to that question in this particular chapter of apostolic adventure, we find a thread which will lead us to the answer to another question — why so many in later days, and so many today, dare not join themselves openly and irrevocably to the undisguised Christian movements of their time and place.

Some answers are very evident even on the surface of the narrative. For one thing, the Christian movement had gone on just long enough for the bills to begin to come in. Something had to be paid, paid in loss, in suffering, in risk, in courage. So, in view of that cost, now inflicted, many considered it an ideal time to retire. "This," they said, "is as far as we go."

Such is an endlessly repeated pattern of conduct. In nearly every movement that calls for changes the very first stages are comparatively easy. It takes some time for knowledge of "what these folks are up to" to get around to the interests which are threatened. In the interval those in the movement are either unnoticed or regarded as innocuous. Then it begins to appear what they are up to. In the hue and cry raised it becomes clear that from this point on belonging to the group is going to cost. So part of the company always say good-by hurriedly.

That is standard history in every great movement. The decision to erect a church building, for instance, always acts as a sort of purge of the membership. From here on it will cost; so a great many dare not attach themselves, or they detach themselves on whatever pretense they can think of. In like manner the ranks of pacifists always thin as war approaches. A reviewer commenting on H. G. Wells' later novels says that they "begin strong, go on gathering fury for a third of the course, and then sit down like a baked apple." People, as well as novels, sit down like a baked apple at crucial spots.

Then, again, the time for positive action is a time for slinking away. The office of every organization working against definite evils knows well the "don't use my name" letter of support. There is a vast "don't quote me" brotherhood on the fringes of every cause, people who dare not attach themselves openly. A man declared not long ago that the world's most needed invention was an extra key

on the typewriter that would make a mark which could be taken for an "E" or an "I." There are many who "durst not" speak in any other sort of language.

Men are kept back from open shoulder-to-shoulder fellowship in a costly struggle by self-centered focus of mind. That was true here in Jerusalem; it is true everywhere. President McCracken of Vassar College has pointed out that the "Code Polonius" is the basic law of many people. "That code," he says, "consists of a purely selfish line of action and of suppressing all generous thought and feeling." When the Code Polonius supplants the Code Jesus, men do not dare attach themselves.

IMMORAL MAGIC

They even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that, as Peter came by, at least his shadow might overshadow some of them.

ACTS 5:15

This is an early example of a very vicious thing in Christian history, a belief in the efficacy of relics.

Of course, an endless train of beautiful and impressive sermons has proceeded from this mention of Peter's shadow. No variation in exegesis can spoil the main contention and appeal of those sermons. That theme, the reality of unconscious influence, roots deeply in human experience; and the narrative of Peter's shadow is a vivid symbol of that truth.

Yet it is evident that such a homiletic use of this narrative can never be more than merely symbolic and suggestive. The presence in the Book of Acts of this recording of the belief in the healing efficacy of Peter's mere shadow bespeaks something vastly different from the truth of unconscious influence. It is evidence of the superstitious belief in mechani-

cal magic which has been an evil force in history. R. P. Rackham in his commentary on Acts sees this superstitious element, but passes over it far too lightly and piously. He writes: "This savors to us of superstition. But miracles are 'signs' and the best 'signs' for the instruction of the simple-minded; and by this and similar instances, in the case of the Lord (the hem of his garment) and St. Paul (cloths from his skin, Acts 19:12) the lesson is taught that spiritual influence can be conveyed through material things."⁴⁷

Such an "improving" reflection overlooks the long history of spiritual corruption which the belief in an immoral magic has brought with it, the feeling that anything connected with a saint or a great man has in itself an automatic magical power. On such a foundation has arisen all the sorry hocus-pocus of the nails from the cross, the magical bones of the saints. It has allowed the inwardness of Christianity to be overcome by a flood of paganism.

Present-day manifestations of this belief in the efficacy of relics are found wherever some material accompaniment of a spiritual movement or personage is substituted for the spirit itself. We see a widespread instance of this in the devotion to the relics of revolutionary heroes of many Daughters of the American Revolution who would shrink in terror from any contemporary expression of the spirit of the heroes. They are interested, for instance, in Israel Putnam's shadow, and erect monuments at the places where he fought the battles of his day. But any true spiritual descendant of Putnam's, contending against the tories of today, would be ridden out of town on a rail if the relic worshipers could arrange it. A striking example of this was the resignation from the Society of Mayflower Descendants of Bishop Brewster of Maine, because so many of his fellow descendants from the *Mayflower's* passengers violently objected to his belonging

to the American Civil Liberties Union. Did irony ever reach a higher peak? The children of the immortal contenders for civil liberties hounding a man out of their order because he shared the devotion of his ancestors to a cause to which they gave their lives!

Veneration of relics is often a substitute for sharing of the spirit of religion. The relics of John Wesley, for instance — teapots and spoons and buckles — may easily become a more dominant interest than the present-day expression of his spirit, “the very flame that over England breathed.”

The substance is more than the shadow.

LIVING BY IMPERATIVES

We must obey God rather than men. ACTS 5:29

The word “must” frequently has the clank of a ball and chain about it. We do not instinctively like it. We can all have a good deal of understanding of Queen Victoria’s feelings when she snapped at Gladstone, who had told her she must put her signature to a document in front of her: “Do not use the word must to me.”

Yet there is no rattle of fetters to the word as Peter and other disciples used it to the high priest. It did not have the drag of chains; it had the lift of wings. It is the word of men whose lives had an undebatable compulsion. They traveled a rough road, which wound through riots and jails. But along it they marched to the music of a great imperative.

This was not something peculiar to Peter and the apostles. It is a rock-bottom fact about human nature. When life gets into the imperative mood, when it freely and unanimously responds to something acknowledged as compelling, it is lifted out of little merry-go-rounds, out of bondage to

fear and desire, out of the paralysis of indecision. But when life loses its absolutes it dwindles down into the pursuit of pleasure.

These words from Acts catch some of the gleam that a great imperative brings into life. On one side of the courtroom there is the sorry cluster of ecclesiastical politicians, "career men," bound to nothing except tradition and selfish interest. On the other side are the prisoners, in jeopardy of punishment. But they are not to be pitied. The accepted "must" of the will of God has brought into their lives an intensity of experience, a dignity, a new spiritual dimension, of which the others could not dream.

It is a great way of living — living by imperatives.

Where does human life find its authentic imperatives? Three suggestions may be worth exploring.

Let us put our imperatives in front of us rather than behind. It is a red-letter day for anyone when he stops being pushed from behind and starts to be pulled from in front, when the most powerful imperative is not the crowding necessities that tread on his heels, but something he wishes to overtake, something he aspires to.

Let us put our imperatives at the place where Jesus meets our nature.

Let us put our imperatives at the place where Jesus cuts across our world, where his way of life stands in stark opposition to dominant codes of action.

POLICE LAWLESSNESS

*They beat them and charged them not to speak in
the name of Jesus and let them go. ACTS 5:40*

Nineteen hundred years later this narrative still makes our blood boil. There was no conviction of the apostles, no

justice; merely the arbitrary lawless assertion of police power, might instead of right.

Yet if we are indignant at this unjustifiable beating of the apostles, when there had been no legal trial or conviction, how do we feel when the same thing occurs, as it does continually, in labor clashes between police and workers, and in the treatment of other groups in the community whose standing is as low as was that of the outcast Christians among the police of Jerusalem?

As we look back across the centuries to this lawless violence, our sympathies are entirely with the victims of injustice and police lawlessness. Where are our sympathies today? Unless we do some resolute and vigorous thinking about such actions, carefully weighing each case, they are much more likely to be with the police, on the side of lawless violence and cruelty. Under the pressure of propaganda and hysteria we are likely to become the supporters and applauders of lawless violence masquerading under the guise of law and order.

SAVE THE STATUS QUO!

And shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us.

ACTS 6:14

This frantic cry over the danger of customs' being changed is one of the evidences which support the contention that there is nothing new under the sun. The final, though often unspoken, argument against any new idea, revelation or movement is that it will "change the customs handed down to us." This argument is advanced with most fervent feeling by those who are profiting pretty well under the present customs. Such was emphatically the case here in the

desperate warfare of the temple hierarchy against Christianity. This mention of the danger to established customs is put into the place of climax. It was the real reason for hounding the Christians to jail, in contrast to the good or official reasons which were frequently given, more respectable religious and patriotic reasons.

The whole situation closely parallels the opposition today of entrenched privilege to proposals for general social welfare. "They will upset our customs," is the alarm sent out. Using the terms of modern parallels, we might say that here the sons of the Israelitish revolution launched a crusade against the vile plot to change the sacred customs of their forefathers. The fact that the strict observance of those same customs brought in large profits to the clique who controlled the temple revenues was not prominently displayed in starting the popular uproar. Nor are similar facts emphasized in patriotic hysterias fomented by the high priests of economic power today.

The struggle to preserve the *status quo* is usually closely related to either pocket-book or prestige, often to both. For this reason change in material processes is eagerly welcomed; it promises to add to profits. Change in social thinking and habits is feared; it holds a threat, even though sometimes a vague one, to profits. Esme Wingfield-Stratford comments on this well known fact in recording the history of England in the age of Victoria: "It was curious in an age that prided itself on its material progress, that on the spiritual and artistic side of life, there should have been so deep-rooted a fear of not preserving the *status quo*." ⁴⁸

One form which the resistance of profit making to the criticism of ethical and social Christianity frequently takes in our day is pious distinction between what it calls constructive criticism and what it damns as destructive criticism. In rough but honest language, the constructive criticism thus welcomed with ostentatious open-mindedness is criticism that

does not touch the heart of the evil. Hence the welcome. The upshot of too naïvely accepting this classification of criticism is that any really penetrating appraisal of evil is made to look like the advent of chaos. A writer in a periodical has recently done a large service in laying bare this particular fallacy: "When a man speaks of constructive criticism, he usually means a fulsome endorsement of something that is very close to his heart or pocket; by destructive criticism he means a severe questioning or attack upon that something. . . . Strictly there can be no such thing as constructive or destructive criticism. Criticism is a process of appraisal. . . . In nine cases out of ten . . . [these terms] are used as an ointment to the esteem of easily wounded persons."⁴⁹

This is a bit of realism which everyone working for a more Christian world should clearly grasp. Otherwise he is likely to be browbeaten by the use of the phrase "destructive criticism" as a scarecrow or hobgoblin to frighten him away from bringing a thoroughgoing criticism to bear on our society. Of course, Christian ethics involves destructive criticism, destructive to what flagrantly denies the right of Christ to dominate the world. The ax is laid at the root of the tree.

Of course, there is much of immeasurable value in the customs and minds of the past.

"Yet think not unto them was lent
All light for all the coming days,
And Heaven's eternal wisdom spent
In making straight the ancient ways."

No more calamitous injury to the Christian cause could be done than to identify Christian conduct with the social practices and conventions or the economic axioms of the past century, or with the standards and values which ruled its thought and its social conscience.

The frightened priests, striking back with every weapon

they could devise, did at least manage to express, even though unintentionally, the profound insight that it is the purpose of Christianity to change not merely ideas, but customs.

AN EXALTED COMPANION

They saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

ACTS 6:15

“The author doubtless intends to record a miraculous transformation. Just as when Moses was on Mount Sinai and as in the gospel story of the transfiguration, the miraculous change of countenance implies the presence of an exalted companion.”⁵⁰

The presence of an exalted companion — how many great chapters of human history those words interpret! What proved reality they represent, as they light up with their glow an innumerable host of human lives! We catch a vision of that reality in the last words of John Wesley, “The best of all is, God is with us.” An “exalted Companion” rode the highways of eighteenth century England with him, and with others, through flood and mob. We catch a glimpse of that same presence in the words of the great missionary to the Pacific isles, John G. Paton, after he had dug a grave for his wife on the lonely shores of the South seas: “If it had not been for Jesus, I could not have gone on.” We catch it again in the classic record in Sir Ernest Shackleton’s book *South*, where, describing the terrible journey of three men over the icy wastes of the Antarctic, he says: “When I look back upon these days with all their anxiety and peril, I cannot doubt that our party of three was divinely guided both over the ice and across the storm-swept sea. I know that during that long and racking march of thirty-six hours over the unnamed mountains and glaciers of South Georgia,

it seemed to me often that we were not three but four. I said nothing to my companions on the point, but afterwards Worsley said to me, 'Boss, I had a curious feeling on the march that there was Another Person with us.'"

The exalted companion whose presence transfigured the face of Stephen still illuminates the life which is turned toward Him. The brightest shining of personality is not self-originated, any more than is the lighting in Rembrandt's great painting "The Night Watch." A night scene in a medieval Dutch town, the painting represents the watch of gorgeously accoutered figures making their rounds. The sole illumination is, seemingly, from torches borne by the squad; so marvelously has the artist handled high lights and deep shadows that one is almost convinced that the picture originates and radiates its own light. But that is a deception. It is a reflected light that radiates from the faces. Professor Eddington has enunciated a law of the spiritual as well as of the physical world when he declares, "The best absorbers are the best emitters."

It is true of physical substances. It is true of lives. Those who are the best absorbers of the spirit of the exalted Companion, are the best emitters of light. This is beautifully expressed in Walter Bagehot's lovely description of Frederick Dennison Maurice: "He seemed to be the channel of a communication, not the source of it."

YES OR NO?

And the high priest said, Are these things so?

ACTS 7:1

This is an old trick. It is used every day. It is one against which the person who wishes to do straight and Christian thinking in a complex world needs constantly to be on his

guard. Stephen could not have made a yes or no answer to this question of the high priest and thereby really disclosed the truth. The charges made against him were so mixed with partisan distortion, they contained so many implications that needed qualification and explanation, that he could answer with neither a clear yes or no.

This type of question is frequently used in argument and propaganda and in the courtroom with a view to committing the person accused to a damaging assertion, no matter how he answers. Thus it is related to that stock question so frequently met with in logic books and joke columns, "Have you stopped beating your wife?" The question contains a buried assumption to which no honest yes or no reply can be given.

Of course, there are issues and decisions which must be answered by a yes or a no if one's ethical integrity is to be preserved at all. When such questions are met by an evasive answer the soul has begun to disintegrate. The book of political comment, *The Mirrors of Washington*, has well described this process. "It was difficult," the authors write, "for Colonel House to say no. He might go so far as to utter the first letter of that indispensable monosyllable; but before he accomplished the vowel, his mind would turn to some happy 'formula' passing midway between no and yes." However true this may or may not have been regarding Colonel House, it is, at least at times, a disturbing picture of the rest of us.

Yet by no means all issues are of this simple yes or no variety. Spiritual and moral progress is held back disastrously by people's allowing themselves to accept questions reduced to an impossible and deceiving simplicity. Take the question that disturbs many people, "Do you believe in the Bible? Answer yes or no!" Who can answer that in a monosyllable? A "yes" is often interpreted as committing

a person to an unintelligent literalism which misconceives the whole nature and function of the Bible. On the other hand, a blank "no" totally misrepresents a Christian conception of revelation. So endless examples might be cited. Our super-patriots often put the international question in some such warped form as this, "Are you for the United States or for a League of Nations?"

In labor issues there is urgent need to guard against this old yes-or-no-trick. The innocent looking question, for instance, "Do you approve of violence in strikes?" covers a multitude of snags. Any sensible and socially minded person is opposed to violence. But if one answers "no," that beautiful simplicity may blind us to highly relevant facts: that most violence in strikes has been incited by companies; that the powerful owning groups have practiced violence in concealed but brutal forms as a regular policy. A clear answer must take in realistically the whole range of issues involved.

Grover Cleveland gave a notable and noble example of refuting the bullying of this type of argumentation. When the battleship *Maine* was blown up in Havana harbor one newspaper proposed a popular subscription for a memorial to the sailors, and asked Mr. Cleveland to add his name to the list of prominent men who had endorsed the plan. This brought the following telegram from Mr. Cleveland:

"To William Randolph Hearst:

"I decline to allow my sorrow for those who died on the *Maine* to be perverted to an advertising scheme for the *New York Journal*." ⁵¹

Stephen was not deluded by this trick. He answered neither yes nor no. He replied in one of the longest speeches in the Bible. He seized the chance to give the court the

whole Christian gospel, its philosophy of history, its theology and ethics. There could be no adequate answer without all that pertinent truth. His technique is an essential one for every time.

TRUE DEFENSE IS ATTACK

*And he [Stephen] said, Brothers and fathers,
hearken.* ACTS 7:2

This speech of Stephen's is one example of an evangelistic technique found many times in the speeches in the Book of Acts, when Christian disciples were given an opportunity to defend themselves. They never limit themselves to defense; they always go on to positive preaching. It was Paul's technique in every speech. Again and again he gave the most daring demonstrations of it. He always transformed a prisoner's dock into a pulpit. If the courtroom happened to be a king's throne room, so much the better. The practice always requires courage, and is based on an unassailable principle, the superior power of the positive over the merely negative.

Lake and Cadbury make a general comment on this early Christian procedure: "All observation shows that religious and political pioneers when brought into court never attempt to rebut the accusations brought against them, but use the opportunity for making a partisan address."⁵²

Yet this superb evangelistic method has often been forgotten or neglected. Preaching has been allowed so often to major in defense, to become a tangle of bickering refutations, to be leveled off into minor engagements and to neglect the primary task and opportunity, a continuous positive presentation of the Christian message. Instead of saying, "This

one thing I do," it has mumbled, "These dozens of little things I dabble at."

A pastor in a western city in the United States from his deathbed sent this message to his congregation: "Do not ever move your church from its present location. *The church makes a great mistake when it gets on a side street.*"

There could be no more important message to a church and its ministry, in regard to its message as well as to its physical location, than "Keep off of side streets." Stephen in his glorious speech did not get detoured into side streets. He started down the main avenue in his first words, "The God of Glory," and he made a triumphal progress along it.

LIFE BEGINS AT FORTY

But when he was well-nigh forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

ACTS 7:23

When one reads these words about Moses' walking into his life work when he was forty years of age, the mind bounces off like a billiard ball to the title of a book of a few seasons back, of which the publishers assure us that they have sold an incredible number of copies — *Life Begins at Forty*. However true or false that statement may be as a universal generalization, it is true that life did begin for Moses at forty. That was not because he had reached any magic day on the calendar, but because, when he was forty, he began to get about a bit. He began to poke into things and see what was happening in his world. He got out from behind the barricade of a king's palace and down into the brick yard where his brothers were driven under the lash. He escaped from the royal routine of "peace, perfect peace," and got

into the midst of a labor struggle. In short, he got off his settled beat into life.

Moses comes vividly to mind when one looks at the gold-covered mummy case of the young Prince Tutankhamen in the National Museum at Cairo. The feeling comes, "There, but for the grace of God, lies Moses." For that is what Moses would have been had he not struck a tangent to his earlier career — a mummy. According to the tradition in Exodus, Moses was a ward of Pharaoh and would have rated the honor of a tomb in a pyramid. There his body would have rested for four thousand years, and then, one morning, he would have blazed forth in the world's newspapers under some such headline as this: "Gold mummy discovered by Howard Carter."

But Moses did not want to be a mummy. Not that he made any conscious choice. Life's greatest choices are rarely conscious ones. But he did choose. He preferred to be an actor in a living drama. We can readily see that life began for him at forty. He stepped into the great enterprise of leading a revolt, of shaping an unpromising mass of slave labor into the beginnings of a nation. The most impressive picturing which our contemporary age affords of the achievement of Moses is the scene in *The Green Pastures* of the march out of Egypt into the Promised Land. It is part of the big parade of humanity out of bondage into its human heritage.

It is the choice we all make — either some sort of mummy, or life.

Life began for Moses when he got on the rim of his world, when he began to grow in awareness of people and of what life meant to them. That is when life in the fullest sense begins for anyone. This is not a matter of duty, charity, kindness, so much as of intellectual adventurousness. It is the dedication of the imagination to social ends. It is the

projection of mind into the lives of others, so that we get a real feel of the burdens which cut cruelly into other shoulders. Thus we escape from the little one-celled universe of our individual desires and emerge into life.

Life began for Moses when he got into a fight. That is when life begins for anyone. To say this is not to stress the virtues of pugnacity; it has none. Nor is it to extol the oversimplification of the complex issues of life and society into clear sharp black and white; that is a delusion which easily besets radicals and reformers. It is rather the feeling of moral alternatives, the response to the struggle of humanity which pulls on something deeper than reason. Life began for Moses when he stopped strolling as a neutral observer and became part of a struggle for justice and human right. It is the reddest of red-letter days in the life of anyone when he gets down from the grandstand into the arena of life.

NEW GODS FOR OLD

God . . . to whom our fathers would not be obedient, but thrust him from them, and turned back their hearts unto Egypt, saying unto Aaron, Make us Gods that shall go before us: as for this Moses who led us forth out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him.

ACTS 7:39-40

This cry from a far yesterday echoes loudly through our world today. In many forms this old impatient, resentful desire to trade a hard God for an easier one finds expression. First spoken in the stark primitiveness of an Arabian desert, it booms out today through all the amplifying agencies of our age of wonders, the radio, the printing press, the motion

picture. It is the cry for the more visible God, the accommodating God of the easier ethical demand, the more useful, more nationalistic God, more nearly on a line with materialistic minds and desires — a God with no nonsense about him.

Amid the difficulties of the desert march many of the Israelites rebelled against this God of Moses, this God of long purposes and high demands. They wanted a God of the short cut, a quick means to an immediate practical result.

That ancient and modern mode is concisely and rather accurately expressed by a character in Margaret Deland's novel *Captain Archer's Daughter*. To his son, eager to put a steam engine in his father's ship, the old sea captain says, "The wind, that's God's engine." The boy replies, "I like steam best. *God is tejiuous.*"

So the complaining Hebrews felt. So a multitude feel to-day, curiously assembled of nazis, fascists, communists, militarists, economic individualists, stubbornly defending exclusive privilege — "God is tedious." "Make us Gods that march before us."

It is the cry of those who whittle down the Christian God to the pigmy stature of a warlord. "Give us," they cry — usually in very pious-sounding and suave words, often in the form of scriptural expositions — "give us a God who marches." Give us a God who speaks, not in the wishy-washy language of the Beatitudes but in the clear, positive tones of the drill manual. Give us a God who wears shoulder straps, who responds trimly to the command "Fall in!" when the rulers need to recruit him for the duration of the war.

A writer on Russia recently recorded that when it was discovered that the word for God had been printed with a capital letter in some schoolbooks, the initial was changed to lower case in each of a million copies before the edition was allowed to reach the pupils. But it is not only in Russia that it is a political crime to spell God with a capital G, but in every

place where the state is elevated to supremacy over conscience. That is the clear meaning of the majority decision of the Supreme Court in the Macintosh case, which denied citizenship to one who put the supreme allegiance of his conscience to God. That decision has well been called "stark and naked blasphemy." As a group of American missionaries in China declared, "So long as this decision of the Supreme Court stands unreversed, so long has pagan worship of the state become the official American religion." It is an officialized version of the old choice in the desert, "Give us a God who will march before us."

STOPPING THE EARS

*They stopped their ears and rushed upon him with
one accord.* ACTS 7:57

The action of the hostile crowd after Stephen's defense and preaching followed a pattern endlessly repeated. They closed the avenue by which new information and ideas might reach them and took refuge in "rushing." They ceased to think above the ears and began thinking below the neck. In other words, physical action, directed by prejudice and self-interest, took the place of learning and thinking. Rushing is always much easier than keeping the ears open so that the mind may get the data for positive thinking.

It is easy for us to look back in scorn on this irrational action of a mob. But we cannot dismiss this record with such an easy, complacent response. It probes deeper. It carries a barbed question: What is your most characteristic reaction in the presence of new and disturbing ideas? Do you keep your ears open or do you "rush"?

We ought to hesitate to range ourselves too readily on the

side of the angels in this regard. We need humble self-observation. We can all be complacent about our open-mindedness to new ideas which do not upset our particular interests. But new ideas and gospels which graze closely our neat and cozy arrangements or views of the world are the ones which test us. A new idea in those realms is a truly disturbing factor. Take new proposals in economic life, for instance. What blind "rushings" they incite all about us. Most of those who have a stake in the existing social and political order dislike a new idea of that sort. It upsets their peaceful inertia. When they think about it at all they rush into invective and denunciation. A retired American college president screamed out in the spring of 1937 that the adoption of the child labor amendment would bring constitutional government to an end. He "stopped his ears and rushed blindly."

There is always some sort of furious, unintelligent rush when one stops his ears. In the ears are the organs of physical balance; and in the ears are the organs of mental and spiritual balance.

Dr. J. A. Hutton has keenly observed that the Psalmist who exclaimed with great gratitude, "Lord, my heart is fixed," did not exclaim, "Lord, my mind is closed." Yet one of the commonest mistakes in the whole field of organized religion is the confusing of the closed mind with the fixed heart. Consider, for instance, the obsession which prevails among such a large number of laymen in the churches today against organized labor. It is one of the major obstacles to the extension or even the retention of the church's influence among millions of its possible adherents. Many "leading" laymen in the church take toward the rights of labor the same attitude that Metternich of Austria took toward political revolution. He said it was "the disease which must be cured, the volcano which must be extinguished, the gangrene which must be burned out with a hot iron, the hydra with jaws open to swallow the social order." Frequently the attitude of these

laymen is expressed in about equally violent words. "They stopped their ears."

Each one of us might well ask, At what point in today's controversy do we stop our ears and begin to "rush"?

REVERSION TO SAVAGERY

*Now when they heard these things . . . they
gnashed on him with their teeth.* ACTS 7:54

Here is a neat little picture of a reversion to savagery. It is unlovely in its physical details. It is a perilously short slide from anger, with which these opponents of Stephen were possessed, to the physical manifestations of a subhuman, animal inheritance. When seized with fury men tend to forego a human response to a situation or a person, and revert to an animal reaction. Gnashing is a savage use of the teeth. The human use of teeth in a discussion is to assist in vocalizing rational language. To gnash is to forswear that human function. In this reversion language ceases to be language and becomes a growl.

The mental reversion to savagery is just as unlovely as the physical. The mind "gnashes," as well as the teeth. The precarious footing on the summit of rationality, which man has gained by centuries of upward climb, is lost, and instead of exercising reason the mind, surrendered to fury, spits, snarls, and howls.

Both in personal life and in the larger social world there is increased need of the human mind as opposed to reversion to savagery. When we use the word "human," as inclusive of the highest possibilities of man, we should remember that man overtakes his potentialities under spiritual illumination and a vision of divine standards. Bertrand Russell can diagnose the need: "The world is suffering from intolerance and

bigotry, and from a belief that vigorous action is admirable even when misguided.”⁵⁸ But he presents no cure except the old “lift yourselves by your own bootstraps” remedy. The cure for the disease in Stephen’s executioners lies in the divine resources on which Stephen himself had laid hold.

TWO FORCES IN THE UNIVERSE

*And they stoned Stephen, while he was calling upon
the Lord.*

ACTS 7:59

Two forces in the universe are in clear view here. One is represented by stones. The other is represented by prayer. There is a world of physics. In this particular conflict physical forces overwhelmed spiritual ones. The hard material stones hurled at Stephen crushed out his life. The physical forces were victorious. The spiritual powers, represented by Stephen’s prayer, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,” were conquered. That is, they were conquered if the final verdict were to be written up at sundown. But history has never been on the side of the heaviest stones. Truth crushed to earth has a disconcerting way of rising again. The verdict of history goes not to physical power or the finality of stones, but to the spiritual forces represented in the prayer of Stephen.

The contrast between the two forces has been freshly carried in our day into the realm of physics itself. There are two camps with regard to the nature of life, the mechanists and the vitalists. The mechanists believe all science ultimately will turn out to fall in the physical category, while the vitalists hold that life is something over and above mechanism — something which always will require its own unique category.

There is the old conflict in every mind — stones versus prayer. To which aspect of reality do we give the greatest

weight — the tangible, measurable, weighable things, or the intangible realities of spirit? So many minds get smothered by a "practical" philosophy of things. "Sensible" men, using that word in its very literal sense of men relying entirely on the physical senses, pooh-pooh the reality of spirit.

" On fire that glows
With heat intense
They turn the hose
Of common sense,
And out it goes
At small expense."

Dr. W. B. Selbie expresses the essence of the Christian faith when he says: "Prayer, worship, and the practice of the presence of God are not, as is often supposed, ways of escape from reality, but the means by which we keep in touch with the only reality which is worth talking about."

These are the days in which our ears are bombarded by the boom of the heaviest battalions. If that loud din is the only music to which our ears are attuned we may be betrayed into despair of the victory of spiritual power. As in the case of Stephen's murder, we need a long-time frame for evaluating the forces in the world. And history often reinforces the verdict of faith in spiritual forces. A bit of real hope in a day of dictators gleams out from history in the comment of Philip Guedalla on the passing of the dictatorships which sprang up over Europe after the savage suppression of the revolutions of 1848. On the evidence of that history he says: "Dictatorship is only a device by which an air of permanence is lent to temporary regressions. . . . For dictatorship is oddly mortal, but the revolution lived."⁵⁴ Stefan Zweig expresses the same faith and hope: "A dictatorship cannot everlastingly maintain its ruthless radicalism. . . . Dictators are but temporary forces; and what aspires to hedge the rhythm of life within a

field of reaction, achieves its aim only for a season, to lead, then, to a more energetic escape.”⁵⁵

Of Stephen, as of other prophets, it may be truly sung:

“ He lifts a banner to the sun
And wakes a music in the heart;
Yours may the triumph be, if won,
But his the vision to impart.”

LYNCH LAW

And devout men buried Stephen. ACTS 8:2

The record of Stephen's murder is a good place at which to begin an exploration of the temper which leads to lynching, and the creation of public opinion for the eradication of lynching. On these words of Acts Lake and Cadbury make the comment, “The fact that this wake was possible is an indication that Stephen was lynched rather than executed.”⁵⁶ With this record clearly in mind, we can get fresh light on the nature of lynch law. The same foul barbarism which blackens the record of the United States year after year was responsible for the death of the first Christian martyr. Here it appears in all its horror, and the study of its growth and the mental traits underlying it furnishes an effective parallel in the creation of antilynching sentiment.

It ought to cause severe self-searching and enable us to see how easily we skirt the edges of the mob, how readily, if we allow savage and undisciplined resentments to blot out in us respect for law and feelings of humanity, we take our place in guilt beside the consenting Paul, holding the clothes of the lynchers.

The two great issues in the sin of lynching have never been more feelingly expressed than in James Weldon Johnson's lines written after looking at the charred remains of a burn-

ing at the stake in Memphis. He calls for a dedication to the eradication of lynching for a twofold purpose, "to save Black America's body and White America's soul." 57

CRAZY LOGIC

But Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house, and dragging men and women committed them to prison. They therefore that were scattered abroad, went about preaching the word.

ACTS 8:3-4

Notice the "crazy" logic in the two sentences above. It centers in the word "therefore." To a prudential and practical mind it doesn't make sense at all. Look at it: persecution and imprisonment rampant; therefore — they kept right on doing what brought on the persecution. Strange use of a "therefore." The course was full of danger — therefore they went right on with it.

Many an ecclesiastical "statesman" in every century knew many a trick worth two of that. We can revise this bit of history as it would have been written if the caution and strategy with which we are so painfully familiar had prevailed. It would have read like this: "Violent persecution arose. Therefore, they all lay low and ceased preaching till the storm blew over." We have all listened to many addresses on the peril of doing anything at an inopportune time — the danger of "spilling the beans," the hopelessness of ever expecting to grow (or paying off the mortgage on our new Gothic plant) if we alienate possible givers by unpolitic utterances.

But these naïve disciples had not yet advanced to such higher churchmanship. Theirs was a crazy logic. But it was apostolic; and it was divine. Difficulty, persecution, death, if they went on preaching. Therefore, they went on preaching.

It was the logic which led Jesus to the cross, and has led the church to whatever redemptive service it has achieved.

It is the only sane logic for a church of Christ to follow. It is hard to learn, for worldly logic of an opposite sort is so much more immediately appealing. It has been said of Napoleon that "he had an unquestioned magic capacity for victory, *but no technique whatever for defeat.*" Hence Waterloo, where he sorely needed a technique for salvaging the most possible from defeat. Whatever may be the wisdom of such technique in the military realm, there is no question about the fact that many a church has acquired more of a technique for defeat than it has of any magic for victory. They know more about conducting a strategic retreat from difficulties than they do about carrying out an impassioned advance.

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league backward,
Back from the jaws of death —
Stole the six hundred —

that is familiar history! But it is never apostolic history. There is a surer clue to New Testament thinking in the judgment of James M. Barrie in his noble rectorial address at the University of Edinburgh in 1930, that the true idea of education is not to prepare students to give as little trouble as possible, but to send them into the future in the hope that they will make trouble.

UNCLEAN SPIRITS

From many of those that had unclean spirits, they came out, crying with a loud voice. ACTS 8:7

Medicine, psychology, and psychiatry continue to throw light on the New Testament miracles, particularly on what

might be called the most characteristic miracles, those involving mental disorder of some sort. Our understanding of the healings and restorations has become enlarged and deepened as more and more light has emerged in the field of psychotherapy, and as fresh explorations have been pushed into the dim borderland between mind and body. We have learned more of the processes by which a restoring ministry is rendered to a mind diseased.

Yet beyond this new resource for the attempt to understand what exactly happened in the events related in the New Testament as miracles, there is always a permanent and legitimate service to the imagination in these stories of demons cast out. They serve as a picture of an essential service of Christian faith to life and society, that of the casting out of evil spirits — a picture well worth careful study in a day when the time-spirit tends to find the chief and often the only source of evil in material circumstances and forces. It is a primary affirmation of the Christian gospel and faith that there are evil spirits to be cast out of the minds and hearts of men. It is an inalienable task of the Christian religion, unchanged in a day when social effort and struggle are also essential, to perform the spiritual function of casting out evil spirits.

In the realm of individual personality, the pictorial representation of a central function of Christianity given in the miracles of the restoration of divided minds, and the psychological reality of the healing, come close together. Demonic possession, whatever else it may have been, was certainly in part a matter of inner conflict and the healing, then and now, is through a unifying experience, the discovery of a new center of devotion and reference around which the scattered and warring fragments of the self may be brought together. "Christ in me the hope of unity and wholeness," is a characteristic modern interpretation of an old experience. The evil spirits of an anarchic personality are brought into concord as they are brought under the authority of Christ.

Let your imagination range on the wider theme of the unclean spirits that are tearing our world — the demons of prejudice, isolation, hatred, greed. What a need for exorcism is here! A new spirit that acknowledges the dominance of Christ must cast them forth and replace them — the spirit of common understanding, of mutual sympathy, of good will among peoples and races.

Dr. Moffatt in his translation of this verse says that the evil spirits came forth “screaming.” We live in a world where the screaming of evil spirits is painfully audible. We can hear them in the screaming of guns and bombs in warfare and industrial strife. The evil spirit is heard in all its frightfulness in Ernest Hemingway’s report from the battle fronts of Spain: “A writer, when he knows what it is about and how it is done, grows accustomed to war. . . . It is a shock to discover how truly used to it you become. . . . But no one becomes accustomed to murder. And murder on a large scale we saw every day. . . . The totalitarian fascist states believe in the totalitarian war. That put simply means that whenever they are beaten by armed forces they take their revenge on unarmed civilians.”

Under all these manifestations there is the evil spirit of greed. If greed had a color, it would be blood-red. Indeed, one of our own poets has said just that in a simple verse which plumbs to the very center of our demon-ridden world. The words are put into the mouth of a veteran gold miner:

“There’s blue in silver,
Brown in lead,
Green in copper,
But gold is red;
Redder’n blood
In a miner’s pan.”⁵⁸

Gold is red!

JOYLESS CITIES

There was much joy in that city. ACTS 8:8

How much joy — real joy — is there in your city? Keep this sentence in mind and run through the towns and cities you know best. Will they not seem pathetically joyless cities? Of course, if you are going to make a survey with joy in mind — anything resembling that state described by Wordsworth as “the deep power of joy” — you will have to poke under the crust of your cities to find it. The joylessness of cities does not strike one painfully during a casual stroll along a few blocks of Fifth avenue, Park Lane or the Rue de la Paix.

Jane Addams wrote of her days in London, where she was brought face to face with human suffering, that they gave direction and force to her whole life. “For the following weeks I went about London furtively, afraid to look down narrow streets and alleys lest they disclose again this hideous human need . . . bewildered that the world should be going on as usual.”⁵⁹ Her avoidance of joyless streets for a time was due to a deep distress of soul. But many adopt a policy of avoiding the unpleasant in order to deaden their minds and sympathies, and turn a blind eye to human need lest, seeing it, they lose their inertia and complacency.

One of the spiritual and moral gains of our generation is to be found in the surveys made of communities that revealed an appalling deficiency of anything that could be called human joy. Charles Booth in his monumental *Life and Labor of London* pioneered in the task. A generation ago we had the *Pittsburgh Survey*, which aroused such savage resentment among those to whose interest it was to keep well under cover the stark facts about poverty and its effects in that center of money-making. In very recent days we have had the two studies of “Middletown” by Robert S. and Helen Lynd,

studies which probe the facts, not only about the body, but about the soul of a typical American city. In that picture of body and soul there is much that adds up to a sum of notable achievement. But there is little joy, little that expresses fundamental freedom of soul or exhilaration of spirit, little that suggests a life which draws on deep spiritual sources of strength. In Middletown there is an abundance of apparatus for pleasure-seeking, but that abundance is a tragic indication that people searching for their birthright of joy are forced to try to find it by ways cheapened and fouled by commercialism.

How many places come to mind when we think of joyless cities? There are cities where people are strangled by fear, where all life is held in the clutch of the economic power of great companies — places like Weirton in West Virginia and Harlan county in Kentucky.

All over Europe there are joyless cities that pass their days in fear. Babies are fitted with gas masks almost before they are weaned. Terror is in the air. The very sky is becoming a symbol no longer of heaven but of hell, the source from which death may fall on a whole city. The description in Sherwood's play of the joyless cities of today is none too strong: "In every part of the world the good desire of men for peace and decency is undermined by the dynamite of jingoism. And it needs only one spark, set off anywhere by one ego-maniac, to send it all up in one final fatal explosion. Then love becomes hatred, courage becomes terror, hope becomes despair." ⁶⁰

THE FAITH OF A MAGICIAN

And Simon himself also believed. ACTS 8:13

How strange the word "believe" sounds in this connection! Few words take on more shades of meaning. It is a

veritable chameleon of a word. Or, to use another figure, it is a rubber word, which can be stretched from east of the sun to west of the moon. It is made to cover the consecration of a Paul or the loose attachment of a camp follower.

Here in the story of Simon the Magician we find a type of "belief" which is often met. Simon seemed to look on all religion with a critical, professional scrutiny. His tribute to Peter's religion was that of one professional to another. To use our slang term, Simon felt that religion was a good "racket" and that Peter had a better one than his own. Hence he "believed." He was willing to take on anything that promised profitable results. He had the open-mindedness of a shrewd businessman, who is willing to scrap an old machine or method when a better one appears. But for the thing itself, the Christian religion, he had no use. His eye never strayed from the possibility of getting a new means of profitable "astonishment." The nineteenth verse of this chapter, as Lake and Cadbury point out, "shows that Simon wished not so much to secure the spirit as his own possession as that he might sell it."⁶¹

It is a harsh thing to say of any man's belief that it is like the crude self-seeking thing we find in Simon. Yet with the picture clearly before us we cannot help seeing parallels to it in any adherence to Christianity which puts first the advantages likely to accrue from such adherence. The person whose faith is determined by an appraisal of the advantages, economic, social, political, which it offers, is a spiritual relative of Simon the Magician. Religious faith is always vitiated when it is conceived of as a means of obtaining any other thing than the inherent experience of religion itself. To embrace religion from ulterior motives is always to prostitute it, no matter how refined the form.

The danger for all of us lies in the psychological fact that most people find it comparatively easy to "believe" anything which it is to their material advantage to believe. Gamaliel

Bradford writes of the Borgias, "To Alexander and Caesar Borgia and their like, the church was a great business proposition, and it is so extraordinarily easy to believe in anything that gives us an income."⁶² Benjamin Jowett, according to a famous story, gave a young man some twenty-four hours in which to find himself able to accept the historical Christian faith. It turned out to be ample time! It was not that Jowett thought lightly of belief or that he lacked respect for the workings of the soul, but simply that he knew his man. He knew that the man's desire for a teaching post would overcome his scruples about the doctrinal test for the place.

The sort of belief which marks all the tribe of Simon, ancient and modern, never brings admission into the heart of the Christian faith and life. That heart is always devotion to a Master and to that Master's cause; consequently the genuine Christian is always some sort of "fool in Christ." What Thoreau observed of reading is profoundly true of faith: "Most men have learned to read to serve a paltry convenience, as they have learned to cipher in order to keep accounts. Of reading as a noble intellectual exercise they know nothing."

"Faith," as Sidney M. Berry says, "is not a magic key; faith is a vital force."

RIVAL MIRACLES

Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power.

ACTS 8:18

Rival miracles often mark the contest between a new religion and an old one. Simon the Magician here capitulated before

a superiority in miracles. He did not understand the nature of the Christian faith and gospel at all, but he did acknowledge the more startling results of Peter's religion. To Simon, it was a contest in legerdemain between competing spirits.

The whole episode shows clearly the popular conception of religion as magic in the first century. Christianity did not emerge victoriously from its early struggle with rival religions because of a superiority in magic; it won as a philosophy, a world view, a theology. More than that, it won its victories as a way of life, an experience, a fellowship. But here in its earliest days we see Christianity tested and judged, at least by some onlookers, by its power to produce more wonderful miracles.

The old first century conception has reappeared in dramatic form in our day. In its bid for the suffrage and allegiance of mankind Christianity is faced with mighty rivals, and the conflict surpasses in intensity any since the advent of Mohammedanism. The deadly rivals of Christianity today are, of course, not competing religions in the strictest sense, such as Buddhism and other faiths of the east. They are rather the young and powerful faiths of communism, fascism, and nationalism, which have millions in their grip and receive from them the awe and devotion usually accorded to a religion. It is no exaggeration to say that the struggle will be decided by a superiority of achievement, of miracle.

Communism and fascism have performed astounding miracles in the psychological and political realms. In the industrial and economic fields communism has worked what, when all the antecedents are considered, looks like magic. If we allow disagreement with communism's underlying ideology and conceptions and hatred for them to blind us to these genuine achievements, we are totally unfitted either to understand or to deal with them.

In Soviet Russia there have happened in twenty years some

of the most astounding psychological and economic miracles of history. Millions of people, hosts of youth, even in the midst of tremendous difficulties and severe privations have been stirred to prodigious energy and devotion. The "miracles" of Nazi Germany seem to those who cling to the democratic way of life and hope for the world's peace like frightful portents. They are indeed such. Yet the miracle is there — the infusion of new energy and pride and aggressiveness into a defeated and despairing people.

If Christianity is to win against these powerful and, to millions, more alluring competitors, it must perform miracles which outrival theirs. It must present its goals convincingly and demonstrate in action its resources for creating an order of life in which the personal and social potentialities of humanity may be fulfilled. This contest will not be settled by an academic victory of the Christian philosophy of life over a rival ideology, either economic or political. The verdict will be won if at all in the field of practical achievement. What kind of world is Christianity actually creating in practice? What greater miracles is it producing?

PRESTIDIGITATOR

Simon . . . who used sorcery and amazed the people of Samaria.
ACTS 8:9

Simon's was a familiar trade in the Greco-Roman world, that of a conjurer, a magician, who astonished the crowds by tricks of various sorts and made a profitable business out of it. It was not a very high type of art either then or at any later time. Magic, in the professional performer's sense of the word, is a rather tawdry thing.

There is a kind of legerdemain, however, which is one of life's highest, rarest arts. It is a way of dealing with ordinary

things that makes them extraordinary. When it is skillfully done its results are so astonishing that it truly deserves the name, "magic." Rebecca West, paying tribute to Arnold Bennett, gives an insight into this real sort of magic. She says: "He is a prestidigitator with the ordinary — the medium, the mediocre things of life: the trains, the suburbs, the small houses, the people who live in them. That is the secret of his greatness which is otherwise hard to explain. He has not let custom blunt his vision of the astounding bizarrerie of daily life." ⁶³

Ponder that memorable phrase, "prestidigitator with the ordinary." It suggests the application of skill in dealing with that wherewith we are all supplied — the ordinary materials of life. Whether there is to be any sheen on life, any glow to it, any pattern in it of grace or beauty, depends for the vast majority of us on what we can do with the ordinary things. The problem is much like that of the first settlers in a new country, that of building houses of just what they find on the spot.

Not many questions go deeper to the center of zest for life than this: Can you do any tricks with life? Are you a prestidigitator? Can you take the daily common materials of life and so handle them that they take on a touch of true magic?

Of course there are innumerable foolish tricks people try to do with life. There is the something-for-nothing trick, endlessly played by those who attempt to take something valuable out of life without putting anything in. There are the tricks played on the nervous system, all the illusions rising from many sorts of stimulation.

But the art that makes enduring magic is none of these. Some simple suggestions may be given for dealing magically with the ordinary things of life. The first is that whenever we see all that there is in anything or any person, we get a result that seems magical, compared to what the casual on-looker beholds. It is the magic of the artist. A man sees and

portrays all there is in some of the simplest things in life — two peasants in a field, with a church in the distance, and we have the legerdemain of Millet's "Angelus." Galileo sees all there is in a swinging chandelier and we have a new heaven and a new earth. Dostoevsky looks searchingly into one mind and heart and we have the wonder of *Crime and Punishment*. Jesus looks into the heart of Peter and we have the wonder of a transformed and multiplied personality. When we see the lives and situations before us in terms of their possibilities, when we cease our own chatter and stop long enough really to hear what another is saying in spoken or unspoken words, when we look with alert sympathy at people and get beneath defenses and appearances, the most ordinary things and people become extraordinary.

Magic is done with numbers. Life is transformed for anyone who genuinely thinks in terms of the interests and needs of others. Any number over one is a lucky number. There is only one unlucky number. It is not thirteen; it is number one. The number in a family, be it three or twelve or twenty, may be a truly magic number, filling the world with the glory of shared life and a common love. The number of our globe's population — some two billion — is a number with a divine magic, for it is God's number, the number in which we must learn to think.

Magic comes into life through magic words. The most mediocre things of life, all the commonplace items enumerated by Rebecca West in the quotation above — "the suburbs, the small houses, the people who live in them" — are touched with a very uncommonplace significance when they come under the light of God. The word "God" is not a magic word as profanity or as part of a rigmorole routine of listless worship. It is a magic word when it is used as Paul, for instance, used it — as the central sun which throws its radiance into every corner of life.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

For as yet it [the Holy Spirit] was fallen upon none of them: only they had been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

ACTS 8:4

Everything was in order in this religious company in Samaria which bore the Christian name; everything, that is, except the one thing which would give real, distinguishing meaning to that Christian name: the experience of a present vital contact with God through the Holy Spirit; everything except the quickening life which should animate the body; everything except the kindling fire to give a glow to the outward forms. "As yet the Holy Spirit had fallen on none of them."

Just what this episode signifies in the growing development of the organization and sacraments of the church has been a matter of much debate and is clouded in the historical "low visibility" which hangs over the earliest days. It very evidently represents the conception, whether primitive or later, of the basis of the church as residing in apostolic power, a power and authority which later on were eclipsed by a widespread ecclesiastical power. It represents the belief that "baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus does not confer the spirit: the laying on of apostolic hands does."⁶⁴

The vital suggestiveness of this passage however applies not only to the early church, but to the church of all times. Many a church bears the name of Christian though it is without the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the presence or absence of that gift is closely related to the power or impotence of a church. It is so easy for a church to have all its forms in order and its pedigree intact, and yet lack the present life of God.

Erwin Edman has a name for this life of God in the soul of man as we glimpse it in Acts. He writes of "the enraptured indistinction between themselves and the divine being."

That is just a paraphrase of Paul's words, "Christ liveth in me." Walter de la Mare declares that "poetry no more keeps its meaning when turned into corresponding prose, than a picture or a sonata keeps its meaning in the little analyses they print in the catalogues or programs."⁶⁵ We might truthfully add that the Christian religion no more keeps its meaning when translated into the prose of organization or form than does the *Ninth Symphony* when pressed into an explanatory program note.

This central matter of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church penetrates into many fields of experience. Four of the more obvious may be listed here briefly.

For one thing, this situation of a Christian company without the Holy Spirit rather exactly parallels a condition which has obtained throughout history, that of those within the church who have been much more at home in the Old Testament than in the New. Whatever the date A.D. may be, such people are of the old Hebraic dispensation rather than of the new Christian order. They know far more of the tribal, warlike Jehovah than they do of the spirit of Christ. Their religion is far more a legalistic code than an approach to the ideals of the Beatitudes or of the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. It is that persistence of Old Testament Christianity, that absence of the spirit of Christ, which has been one of the greatest frustrations of the kingdom of God in the world. The contrast between this legalistic pre-Christian Christianity and the real thing has been well put by R. H. L. Sheppard: "Christianity does not consist in abstaining from doing things no gentleman would think of doing, but in doing things that are unlikely to occur to anyone who is not in touch with the spirit of Christ."

A second disturbing aspect of this matter lies in the absence in most of our world of any tremendous belief in the present activity of God. God is always being beaten by

superior powers, or he is asleep, or buried in history. A young Englishman, Johnston Stephen, once said that he would like to join the Catholic Church if it were not for the fact that he did not think he believed in God. It seems as though a great many people have not allowed such a little detail to keep them out of the church. To be sure, they do not really believe in God as a present continuing force in the world, but aside from that they are good church members.

An historical example of the withering effect of lack of faith in a God who continually fulfills himself in many ways, is Bishop Butler. To John Wesley the bishop lectured with complacency, "Any pretension to revelations or gifts of the Holy Spirit is a horrid thing, sir, a very horrid thing." He did not realize that the horrid thing in his day, from a New Testament standpoint, was not the evangelical revival but the moribund church of England. (A contemporary records that there were eighteen people in St. Paul's Cathedral for Christmas communion.) Because of this lack of faith in a God of the present hour, the bishop spent his last days looking out from his cathedral at Durham, despairing of the world, while right under his eyes, among the miners at the foot of the hill, God was at work. When faith in the God of today is gone Christianity becomes a museum piece.

Third, the Holy Spirit has been too generally regarded as a soporific influence rather than as an exciting one. Dr. C. Ryder Smyth remarks on this point that "many moderns reduce the Holy Spirit to a soothing influence, but the New Testament knows nothing of this. In the New Testament from Pentecost onwards, the Spirit often excites and always incites." If we had more of this historical understanding and insight, the Holy Spirit would not be so much confined to quiet and lulling retreats. It would incite more arousingly to participation in the holy war against evil.

Again, we have too largely overlooked the relationship,

clearly traceable in the Bible, between the Holy Spirit and intelligence. The Spirit is the inspirer of the mind; too often in the history of the church it has been made to serve as a substitute for action of the mind. George Adam Smith, in his commentary on Isaiah, after observing that in both the Old Testament and the medieval church the Spirit of God was thought of as the inspirer of the intellect, complains that our use of the word "Comforter" "has made it difficult to associate the Holy Spirit with the stern rigor of the magistrate or the scientific attitude of the laboratory." He regrets the doctrine's modern corruptions, one of which, the Catholic, "emphasizes the Spirit's influence in the exclusive operation of the grace of orders," and the other of which, the Protestant, "dissipates it into the vaguest religiosity."

Dr. Guy Emery Shipler wisely suggests that a good text for a Whitsunday sermon would be, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind." "We need," he says, "to ask ourselves whether we have, in intellectual equipment, and in practical efficiency for the business of living, all the Holy Spirit of God might provide us with, if we would cooperate with his mental laws. The late Bishop Williams once declared that on the whole more harm has been done by 'fool saints' than by deliberate sinners."⁶⁶

It is always a pertinent and deep question: Have ye received the Holy Spirit?

"TO HELL WITH YOU AND YOUR MONEY"

But Peter said unto him, Thy silver perish with thee.

ACTS 8:20

These are not very polite words which Peter used to Simon the Magician, but they are orthodox New Testament speech.

And there are many occasions when it would be well for the present-day ministry and church to recover this ancient vocabulary. With considerable exactitude, as well as with considerable vulgarity, these words might be translated, "To hell with you and your money." That is a literal translation of what Peter said.

This forthright and unmistakable refusal to give way before the demands of money might well be described as touched with a divine vulgarity. We need a vigorous paraphrase of the words spoken to Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel: "Be it known unto thee, O King Moneybags, we will not bow down unto thee, nor serve thee." Such language is a password to a state of grace. It is not a vocabulary to be continually or unnecessarily used. It is rather like marriage — not to be entered upon lightly or unadvisedly, but discreetly, reverently, and in the fear of God. The vocabulary on the tongue of the church must, however, be a living one if the church's soul and integrity are to be saved.

A few years ago an Associated Press dispatch gave this bit of news: "A golden calf, antedating by five hundred years the golden calf of Moses' day, was revealed briefly to a selected company by Professor James H. Breasted, Egyptologist of the University of Chicago. After being exhibited, the golden relic was returned to a secret vault." Not all the golden calves have been returned to a secret vault. Some have been set up for worship at boards of trade and stock exchanges, some even beside the altar, obliterating the cross from view. Golden calves are tragic symbols of many of the deeper adorations of our age. Often the truest word on an age is spoken by a poet, and in this connection T. S. Eliot has spoken it. He says: "Perhaps the dominant vice of our time, from the point of view of the church, will be proved to be avarice. Surely there is something wrong in our attitude towards money. The acquisitive, rather than

the creative and spiritual instincts, are encouraged. The fact that money is always forthcoming for the purpose of making more money, whilst it is so difficult to obtain for purposes of exchange, and for the needs of the most needy, is disturbing to those who are not economists. And I believe that modern war is chiefly caused by some immorality of competition which is always with us in times of 'peace'; and that until this evil is cured, no leagues or disarmaments or collective security or conferences or conventions or treaties will suffice to prevent it." ⁶⁷

There persists in varying forms, usually subtle though sometimes crude and blatant, the effort of financial interests to control the utterance of a church's ministry, and eventually, of course, to put the soul of a church into gold fetters. In these very days of widespread fear and reaction among the holding class, the effort to smother the prophetic witness of the church on social and economic questions is more bitter and violent than for many years. That effort must be stubbornly resisted if the church is not to betray its Lord. The church must call to memory some holy words — "Thy money perish with thee." Robert Browning used to delight in amusing children by displaying the strange microscopic powers of one of his eyes. He would inscribe the Lord's Prayer in a circle, and then cover it up completely with a shilling. The Lord's Prayer can be covered up with a coin. That is what, in many respects, the present campaign for the curbing of prophetic Christian witness is trying to do — cover up in our modern life the Lord's Prayer with its imperatives, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done," by a pile of dollars.

"Thy money perish." The conflict cannot be avoided without treason to a trust committed to our care. We must declare in season and out of season that money was made for man and not man for money. We must declare that the

greed which sacrifices men and women and children to things is downright essential atheism. We must declare that any form of economic order which denies ultimate human values a chance for realization is a flouting of the purposes of God.

REPENTANCE FOR PURPOSES

Repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee.

ACTS 8:22

There is a real thrill in noting the exactitude of the language here used and the penetrating ethical and religious insight expressed. Repentance is urged not only for evil deeds, but for evil purposes, a far deeper and more subtle matter. "Repent . . . if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee." Both Moffatt and Weymouth translate "thought of thy heart" by "thy heart's purposes."

The only repentance that avails is one which includes purposes as well as deeds, whether the purposes have been accomplished or not. We have only the most superficial and distorted understanding of life if we do not realize that sin is in purposes. It lies in purpose more than in action because the sin is originally in desire. These words are an accurate reflection of one of Jesus' greatest contributions to religion and ethics, his sense of the inwardness of life.

Repentance for purposes is the hardest kind to make. It is not repentance for an evil deed whose obviousness fairly bludgeons the mind, but for the set of the mind, the elusive desire which often does not issue in any concrete action at all. Such evil is both harder to notice, because it is so deep-seated and concealed, and harder to acknowledge, because acknowledgment brings a more severe shattering of self-

esteem. We can escape the full revelation an act might make about ourselves by saying, "Too bad. I made a slip. I did a bad thing." That admission does not necessarily involve any thoroughgoing shame for the "I" who did the bad thing. But when we repent of our purposes we say, if we are honest, "I am a bad person." That is hard.

Repentance for purposes is also the most necessary sort. Take the evils of war, for instance. We can see much more clearly than other generations the causal relationship between profit-making purposes and the cross-covered cemeteries of Europe. It is rather easy for a people to repent of war, formally at least. In fact we have had notable repentances for the World War, and the Kellogg Peace Pact was a repentance for war as such. But there has been little repentance for those deep-seated purposes of nations which are the causes of war. They are called trade, expansion, spheres of influence, imperialism. The Versailles Peace Treaty showed no repentance for the greed and the desire for retaliation on the part of the so-called "victorious" nations. Lord Riddell's diary of the peace conference makes terribly clear the obscene spirit of "I got mine, boys" which dominated that gathering. He records Lloyd George's comments: "The old dog [Clemenceau] does not believe in all these new-fangled schemes. He thinks the world will go on much as before and you can't really alter things. Well, Wilson has gone back home with a bundle of assignats. I have returned with a pocketful of sovereigns in the shape of the German colonies, Mesopotamia, etc. Everyone to his taste."⁶⁸

What an ironical sound those cynical words, "I have returned with a pocketful of sovereigns," have in view of the world's condition today! Vile purposes were unrepented of. The world was ready for something new, for turning aside from the ways of death.

In personal life also, when we finally ask for forgiveness, but do not repent for our purposes which have clashed with

the purpose of God, we are not so much eradicating our sins as merely dusting them off.

In our striving for this inward repentance there is one indispensable and unailing aid — to keep our minds and hearts in the presence of Jesus. As he walks before our imagination our best will reassert itself and, confronted with him, our worst will be seen without disguise. All depends on the duration and the depth of our view of him. An art critic has written these arresting words about landscape painters: "A Canaletto or a Vermeer may decorate our walls. A Turner or a Van Gogh does more: it leaves the walls and worries us." That is what Jesus does. He leaves the walls of history and worries us if we hang his picture in a central place in our gallery and look steadily enough at it.

This sort of repentance closes in on us and calls for fruits meet for it. We cannot change the actions and purposes of the world. But if our repentance is real we ought not dare to go on accepting the fruits of the world's inequalities, or continue to live on the proceeds of violence in some form or another — as we all must do in such a world as ours — without earnest work for a more Christian order of life, one in which the compromises we all necessarily make at present shall no longer be necessary. Only in such an effort can we hope to save our integrity at all.

THE ENIGMA OF NONRESISTANCE

And Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except someone shall guide me?

ACTS 8:30-31

Here is a state official baffled by a classic statement of the power of nonviolence. What this Ethiopian treasurer was

reading was the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, a supreme poetical expression of the might of love against physical force: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before his shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." This official, a man "of great authority" over all the treasure, could not understand the words.

So it is in our embattled world. Our men "of great authority" — first lords of the navy, secretaries of war, premiers, *Führer* and *duce*, and back of them the peers of the economic realm — cannot understand the philosophy and the powers that make for peace. The costly, positive, sacrificial creation of the possibilities of a peaceful world, as opposed to smooth lipservice of the ideal, is dismissed as the naïve dream of cranks. The attention of "the great" goes to weightier matters, to new bombers, stratosphere flying, airplanes, poison gas.

As the story is told in the Book of Acts, of course, attention is centered on this passage as messianic prophecy and the fulfillment of that prophecy in Jesus. Yet looking at the situation from another angle which is clearly implicit in the record, that of the bafflement of a political official by the attitudes and actions of nonviolent reactions to violence, there is a suggestive picture of one of the major problems of our day. Our state officials are in a dense fog as they confront the ideas underlying the passage concerning the suffering servant. The whole matter of powers for peace-making is an enigma in a world that relies blindly on force and the engines of force.

There are many reasons why nonresistance is baffling to a force worshipping world. It cuts so sharply through the sanctified stupidities of militarism that officials as a class, when pacifism asks them, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" inevitably answer, "How can I?" These reasons are so many and far-reaching that they cannot even be enu-

merated in a small space. Two relevant suggestions may be made, however.

One is that the question of pacifistic measures has been too universally looked at negatively rather than positively. Christian pacifism is not merely the absence of violent counter-blows; it is the pursuance of a different and positive line of action. It is aggressive good will substituted for retaliatory violence. As such it involves positive and sacrificial dealing with the causes of strife. To regard pacifism merely as a sort of inertia that meets violent aggression with nothing but folded hands is to caricature the real thing. Years ago Emerson wrote, "The manhood that has been in war must be transferred to the cause of peace before war can lose its charm." Consider the situation as it is in Europe today. A Christian pacifist policy, had it been put into positive action at the moment of opportunity after the World War, would not have allowed Europe to develop into an armed camp. In its place what was employed? Lord Riddell gives it away with terrible frankness in his quotation of Lloyd George's cynical summary, made on March 30, 1919, a long time before the signing of the treaty: "The truth is that we have got our way. We have got most of the things we set out to get. If you had told the British people twelve months ago that they would have secured what they have, they would have laughed you to scorn. The German navy has been handed over; the German mercantile shipping has been handed over; and the German colonies have been given up. One of our chief trade competitors has been seriously crippled, and our Allies are about to become her biggest creditors. That is no small achievement. In addition we have destroyed the menace to our Indian possessions. . . . Our aim is to secure a peace that will last."⁶⁹

Can anything match the infantile idiocy of Lloyd George's pious hypocrisy, "Our aim is to secure a peace that will

last," appended to such a record of brigandage? A great soldier, Tasker H. Bliss, made a memorable prophecy, since tragically fulfilled, when in 1919 he wrote concerning the peace conference: "Five years from now, the world will condemn the conference if it does not listen to the Germans. The treaty as it stands is unworkable. What a wretched mess it all is!"⁷⁰

Peace-making includes positive removal of the causes of war.

In the second place, the power of nonresistance is misjudged because it is usually regarded as a late step, when it ought always to be an early one. Pacifism is discounted because it fails to put a sudden stop to conflicts which a violent policy has allowed to go too far. That is like condemning a physician for failing to save a patient suddenly brought to him in the last stages of tuberculosis. Aldous Huxley has answered that fallacious judgment of the impracticality of pacifism with sharp pointedness: "True, there is no pacifist technique for arresting shells in mid-trajectory or even for persuading the airmen circling above a city to refrain from dropping their bombs. Pacifism is in the main preventive. If the principles of pacifism are consistently put into practice the big guns will never be let off and the airmen will never be ordered to drop their bombs. The best way of dealing with typhoid is not to cure it, but to prevent its breaking out. Pacifism is to war what clean water and clean milk are to typhoid; it makes the outbreak of war impossible."⁷¹

If early in the post-war years there had assembled an honest conference of nations in which every grievance had been brought up on the table for honest dealing, costly as that might have seemed to the "satisfied" powers, the menace of a nazi Germany would never have developed. As Dr. Fred B. Fisher has well said, "Adolph Hitler was born

at Versailles in 1919." Even today it may not be too late to hold such an honest conference. But if Great Britain prefers iron ore to peace, if the United States prefers her China trade, actual and potential, to peace, if nations prefer the *status quo* to peace, such a conference will never be held.

"How can I understand except someone shall guide me?" That question ought to call every Christian to guidance.

"BEGINNING WHERE HE WAS"

And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture, preached unto him Jesus. ACTS 8:35

There is a deep impressiveness in the simplicity of these words describing Philip's teaching of the Ethiopian treasurer, "beginning where he was." That is the perfect spot for beginning teaching and preaching, and to begin it there shows the highest educational genius. Philip begins at the very place in experience which the man he was talking to had reached. His teaching did not have an alien or remote quality; it was an answer to a question already stirring in the mind of his auditor; it was an interpretation of the experience the man was then having. Consequently it found ready and effective entrance into the living experience of the hearer.

That is great teaching and great preaching. When the presentation of truth does not hook into living experience it always has an academic and ineffectual quality. The soundness of this principle of teaching and preaching ought to be overwhelmingly obvious. As a matter of fact the principle has been surprisingly and disastrously disregarded. Preaching and teaching have begun literally everywhere except at the point of the hearer's present experience. Yet that is

always the live root, the growing point of the mind, the one perfect teaching situation. The great progress in education in our day has come largely from an increasingly skillful application of this truth. Here, for instance, is one way of "teaching" (to use an overstatement!), the use of the dictionary. "Here is a good book, Johnnie; learn ten new words a day." The teacher in that case might well add, "And God have mercy on your soul!" Educators have shown us a more excellent way. A child is launched on an enchanted voyage through Grimm's *Fairy Tales* or Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. He stumbles on a word which blocks his heated pursuit of the story. What does it mean? And the teacher, beginning like Philip at that exact spot, goes on to preach the gospel of the dictionary.

Illustrations are endless — sex education, begun naturally in answer to a child's question rather than with the freezing futility of a formal lecture; geography, beginning with a map of the back yard. Yet preachers have been so slow to grasp the wisdom of "beginning where he was." So often the person asking for the bread of immediate help has been offered the stone of a historical geography of the Holy Land, or one asking for the more abundant life has been given a more abundant theological terminology. A recent writer on public speaking has well said that an early point in every speech as it unrolls in the mind of a listener is, "Why bring that up?" What relation has that to present experience? — that is the angle of any truth a preacher had always better remember. How many starting points there are in the place where people are — in the prevalent dissatisfaction with life as they live it, an experience of unfulfilled possibility which seeks interpretation from the gospel; in the grip of fear that awaits the liberation of faith. There is a timely opportunity in the feeling of frustration so widespread today. A surprisingly large number of the current best selling books is

designed to appeal in one way or another to the frustrated. We have had a stream of them rolling from the presses: *Life Begins at Forty*, *Live Alone and Like It*, *Wake Up and Live*, *More Power to You*, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Fortunes are being made from the exploitation of our national inferiority complex. Beginning where they are is a superb opportunity for teaching and preaching. "Ye are complete in Him." There is no limit to the adaptability of Jesus' message to individual life situations. The gospel is inexhaustible in its specific meanings, as great poetry becomes something different to each reader. Walter de la Mare expresses this fact clearly: "The effect of any particular poem in words must vary with any individual reader and to some degree perhaps with every renewed reading of it."⁷²

Philip's strategy applies equally to widespread moods and tendencies. What a mood of pessimism prevails even among those within the ranks of religion. That is the mood wherein many find themselves today. Disillusioned by the World War and its crushing continuation in the depression they have come to despair of the possibility of remedying the situation. Democracy is despaired of. The "crisis theology" of the European continent reveals a despair of human nature and the prospects of a kingdom of God on earth. In such a day we may well take to heart this story of Philip as delineating not a vicious romantic optimism but a sturdy faith which discerns God in his world.

Let us "begin where we are" in the economic chaos and strife, and taking the present experience as a starting point let us preach with new conviction and persuasive detail that we are members one of another.

STOP THE CHARIOT

And he commanded the chariot to stand still.

ACTS 8:37

The Ethiopian treasurer's action in stopping his chariot and being baptized is an instance of readiness to rearrange life at the advent of a new idea. The logic of the situation demanded a stop. The conversation with Philip had brought a whole new world of fact and interpretation into the Ethiopian's mind. He was not content to let it lodge there lightly, just as a speculation. If it were true it was tremendous and demanded action. It called for the stopping of the chariot so that the new line of action, indicated by the new idea, could be initiated.

Often the most important advance that can be made in life is a halt. So frequently a life goes on under the force of momentum rather than of thought. One starts on a certain way of life and develops an almost automatic power for following it. New ideas pass the mind, caught by the tail of the eye, but they flicker by and do not penetrate into the deeper centers of consciousness. The chariot is not stopped; the implications of the new idea, interpretation or personality encountered do not result in any rearrangement of life. Blind momentum wins over vision or thought.

This Ethiopian was not at the mercy of momentum. He could stop his chariot, to look, to think, to take the first immediate step on the new way in harmony with the new vision, the new idea of the meaning of life, which he gained from Philip's presentation of Jesus.

It is this rearrangement of life, its purposes and goals, its values and controls, at the impact of the ideas and person of Jesus, which is a primary thing in Christianity. It is also the very thing which is so often lacking. The chariot of

life, pushing on toward destinations and on errands chosen without reference to the values and goals of Jesus, is not really stopped. The new ideas received from Jesus do not overcome the established momentum of the old way. They are simply taken on as so much baggage, loosely examined, and do not cause any fundamental redirection of life.

To end our thinking on this matter here would leave us at the rather pleasant business of observing the ways of others and their mistakes. This is always a dangerous business, for it involves the danger of ministering unconsciously to our own complacency and sense of superior wisdom and virtue. That danger can be averted only by turning back on ourselves every great, searching question we raise. Have we ever really called a commanding "Halt!" to our moving coach? Have we really rearranged our lives, turned in new directions, to fit the ideas of Jesus, under the spell of "the face divine that haunts the hopes of men"?

MEANWHILE

They therefore returned to Jerusalem and preached the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

ACTS 8:25

But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached the gospel to all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.

ACTS 8:40

Twice in the eighth chapter of Acts, as well as many other times in the book, we find it recorded that the apostles or other evangelists preached in certain places while making a journey to another place. They had a habit of making the most of incidental wayside opportunities for spreading the good news. Such preaching was not their immediate aim

at the time. They were on their way to larger and more important destinations. But meanwhile, without departing from the main direction, they came upon something unplanned, an incidental opportunity. And they seized it, picking it up, as it were, in their stride.

Peter and John were on their way to Jerusalem. Philip was on his way to Caesarea. But meanwhile, as they went along, not forgetting their chief purpose, they preached whenever they found the slightest opportunity. This "meanwhile" ministry — apostolic interludes, they might be called — was one of the big secrets of the rapid expansion of Christianity in the first two centuries. There was the constant "buying up" of opportunities along the road. It was not only that Paul's great missionary journeys had so many interludes as he pushed on to farther destinations. The journeys of the others through whom Christianity spread, tradesmen, emigrants, soldiers, were of the same kind.

This interlude ministry marks the difference between what might be called a professional attitude toward the task and a consuming purpose, between formal acceptance of the commission, "Go ye into all the world," and the readiness of an alert eye and heart to seize the "meanwhile" opportunities scattered along the wayside. The evangelization of the world is an inspiring but distant goal. A church will not come much closer to that goal by reaching this particular person or putting much effort on that unpromising and very doubtful group. The eyes of a church can be so focused on great ends that they develop a sort of "tunnel vision," capable of seeing objects straight ahead but blind to those along the side. This is the kind of vision characteristic of a large number of churches to which is given the dismal name "zero churches," that is, churches whose yearly increase of membership on the basis of confession of faith is zero.

Religious education needs "meanwhile" ministry. A small down-at-the-heel Sunday school is an unpromising and, to dull eyes, uninspiring wayside station. It seems such an infinitesimal detail in the broad effort for creating a Christian mind in the nation. It does not promise to affect much one way or another the whole result. Yet such details are a part of the picture, and if this apostolic strategy of using the meanwhile does not prevail the whole thing is doomed.

In no other sphere is there greater need of using incidental opportunities than when the goal is the grand — and very distant — one of "a new social order." Of course, if there is to be any real hope of social salvation, a realism is needed which refuses to be fooled by a few tinkering changes here and there when thoroughgoing repentance and change of motive and method are required. There must be a destination, seen and held to.

Yet the very sense of destination may make the one who has it dogmatically disdainful of incidental opportunities for ministering to humanity. Economic radicals often show a lofty contempt for any steps which are less than revolutionary socialization of the means of production. They call such methods "gradualism," a word to be uttered in scorn. The result of this attitude is often a sort of ideological debauch, highly intoxicating but furnishing a means of escape from the difficult tasks of "meanwhile" social legislation and partial remedies for injustice. Such people are on their way to Jerusalem; they have no time to take advantage of the stray opportunities they meet as they pass through Samaria.

Such one-eyed concentration on ultimate ends forgets that the techniques and methods for advance are developed out of particular struggles, through adequate organizations which can be created only out of concrete efforts. The great goal of making society Christian must not be forgotten. But that goal will never be reached if ministry to immediate need

is neglected. We are on the way to Jerusalem; right now, however, we are in Samaria.

One effort must be undertaken on the way, that of creating a climate which will be favorable to Christian social action. The strategic importance of such an effort is well indicated by John Buchan in his comment on the preparation of English opinion for the Puritan revolution: "In all revolutions there is some such background of intellectual ferment. But the creeds of the thinkers do not make impact directly upon the national mind. Popularly there is what Joseph Glanville called 'the climate of opinion,' which is created partly by forces from the intellectual laboratory, forces often strangely perverted, but largely by moods and notions of which the thinkers take little cognizance."⁷³

"Passing through he preached the gospel."

NOTES

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THE ACTS
OF THE APOSTLES
VOLUME II

THE WAY

That if he found any that were of the way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

ACTS 9:2

Here in the narrative of Paul's persecution of the Christians, tucked away in an unobtrusive phrase like a bit of incidental music, is the first use of the expression "the way" as a description of the Christian faith and its adherents. Indeed, it is the first instance of the giving of any identifying name whatever to the Christian group. The term is Hebrew rather than Greek in its origin, the equivalent of the Hebrew *Halakab*, meaning "walk" or "manner of life."¹ We catch a glimpse of this use in the statement of some Pharisees to Jesus: "Thou regardest not the person of men but of a truth teachest the way of God" (Mark 12:14). "The way" is used in this sense a number of times in the Book of Acts, being, for a while, a sort of competitive term with the name given later, "Christians."

Two things, among many others, are noteworthy in this labeling of Christians as those who were "of the way." The first is that what struck deepest into the attention of the early onlookers was a manner of living. The second is that the term, as conferred by outsiders, was undoubtedly, like so many names in the history of religion, an uncomplimentary one.

It is worth permanent remembrance that what first supplied a name for the disciples of Jesus was a peculiar manner of life. They walked after a certain way, so sharply marked that it could be recognized and named. Right at this point is the greatest loss Christianity has incurred as it has come down through the centuries — the tragic fact that so rarely have Christians conducted themselves in a distinctive manner

by which they could be distinguished. If the manner of acting in the daily affairs of life were all the data available, all that one had to go by, the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian would often be impossible to discover, even with the use of a microscope. Christians have been marked by creed — Arian, Athanasian, Pelagian. They have been marked by ceremonial. But how precarious it would be to award the name Christian on the basis of any definite and peculiar way of living, acting or thinking! Yet when that first test which the outside world applied was gone, something vital slipped out.

Of course it never slipped out entirely. It is still vividly present in our world. Recall the times when you have heard the fervent exclamation, "That man is a Christian!" What did it mean? Orthodoxy? Never — that is, never outside of a Sanhedrin of some sort, the ears of whose members were attuned to catch the correct click of proper syllables. Membership in a church? Alas, no! When that exclamation wells up with undebatable conviction, it is always in tribute to one who is "of the way," whose manner of living brings a reminder of Jesus.

The trouble has been that with so many Christianity has never been regarded as essentially a specific way of living. Shane Leslie tells us that Lord Haldane, even though he never knew one note from another, used to go to Beethoven concerts in deference to fashion.² A great many who are counted Christians are similarly ignorant of the difference between one ethical note and another. They, too, are present at the concert through deference. Emerson said of the America of his time, "Our people have their intellectual culture from one country and their duties from another." That same gap often exists in our religion. Our spiritual culture comes from Galilee and Judea, our duties from nearer neighborhoods. And between the two is a great gap, so that from the manner of life we

could not readily deduce the theoretically dominant spiritual conceptions. Multitudes who have sung lustily, "Simply to thy cross I cling," have meant by the cross — when they really meant anything — a personal refuge, not a way of life.

One obvious reason for this is that the way, the action, the deed is hard. To mumble the phrases of belief is easy. As General A. W. Greely once wrote, "heights charm us; the paths that lead to them do not." For instance, which is the more difficult to believe — that Jesus was "very God of very God," or that "love never faileth" and that "he that loseth his life shall find it"? To believe the last is incomparably the harder, if we mean the desperately real belief that is willing to lose life or to employ love as a way of life in season and out of season. That is what is meant by Christianity as a way. And if Christianity is not a way, it is just a clanging and tinkling.

Again, the consensus of scholars is that this designation, "the way," was a "bad" word, uncomplimentary. To the pagan priests the Christian sect was "a way of heresy." It is still a "bad" word. The way of Christ is a dangerous heresy in many of the centers of power and authority in our time. Of course, some who follow the way are honored. Indeed our brightest laurels are reserved for a Father Damien or a David Livingstone. But it is no mere cynicism to say that honor seems to vary directly with the square of the distance from the areas of privilege. Father Damien held out no threat to any entrenched power. Neither did Livingstone. But where existing forms of political or economic dominance are threatened, Christ's way is a heresy. Consider the conscientious objector to war. Read, if you can stand it, the sickening records of the torture applied to pacifists at Leavenworth during the World War. A high priest of Mars, Mr. Duff Cooper, former secretary for war in the British cabinet, has recently turned theological in his language, vehemently

damning "the heresy of pacifism." Look at the daily record of the way in which the holders of power get their revenge on vigorous heretics "of the way" of brotherhood in industry!

Paul has a great word for guidance, eternally valid, to be found later in the Book of Acts, when he was called to account for following Jesus: "By the way that men call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers" (Acts 24:14).

WOMEN IN A MAN'S WORLD

If he found any that were of the way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

ACTS 9:2

Women were on a plane of equality with men in the persecution conducted by Saul. This inclusive phrase, "men and women," indicates, unintendingly, the place of women in the world of the early Christians. It was emphatically a man's world so far as privileges were concerned, but when it came to penalties, women were elevated to equality with men; more often, indeed, given a larger share.

In no field of life have the subsequent centuries brought greater beneficent changes than in relation to women. Yet it is still bitterly true that women today are awarded a major share of the penalties of life and a much more meager share of its privileges. It is still a man's world in an oppressive and thoroughly unchristian manner.

Of course, the cruder expressions of male dominance that were accepted two or three centuries ago now strike us as merely quaint. Consider such a passage as that of Lord Halifax, ingloriously known to fame as "The Trimmer," in his book *Advice to a Daughter*, published in 1770 — a marvelous best seller in its century: "You must first lay it down for a

foundation in general, that there is inequality in the sexes, and that for the better economy of the world the men, who were to be the lawgivers of the world, had the larger share of reason bestowed upon them." That profound observation, so heavily serious when made, is merely humor today. And yet, women have reached equality only in suffering. Indeed, Gerald Heard maintains that the twentieth century has witnessed a definite backward movement so far as justice for women is concerned. "In a world," he writes, "which thought, more and more, of and by analysis and specialization, and acted increasingly through violence, women had really less part than in the nineteenth century."⁸

Here is a newspaper headline, "Reich honors mothers." But what an insulting honor it is! The honor paid to women by militarists is the ultimate degradation of the sex. This particular dispatch described a Mother's Day celebration in Berlin, with Hitler Youth visiting the mothers and presenting to them flowers, cakes and theater tickets. Meanwhile, the nazi minister of the interior explained it all over the radio, exalting "prolific mothers" and calling on German women "not to shirk their natural duty," which, he said, was to "raise a heroic new generation." Honor to women as breeders of new cannon fodder! An overflowing share of the penalties of our civilization, with a skimmed helping of what privileges there are to be dispensed!

That is all far off across the sea. But it represents the perverted chivalry of militarism everywhere. And it represents also the chivalry of a large section of industry. It is an old form of chivalry that sells the women down the river.

To such a condition there must come a fresh grasp of the word ascribed in the Gospel of John to Jesus on the cross, "Son, behold thy mother." That word must be understood, not sentimentally, but fundamentally. We must learn to behold women as truly joint heirs of the bounty of God.

A PERSONAL GOD IN AN EXPANDED UNIVERSE

Who art thou, Lord? ACTS 9:5

W. V. Morton says that every word Paul ever wrote has become a battlefield on which the scholars "have for generations matched learning against learning and have launched theory against theory, until, to the respectful eye of a noncombatant, it seems at times that the battlefield itself has become obscured in the conflict." ⁴ That is equally true of the words written about Paul in Acts. The narrative of his conversion has been a field fought and refought. It has been treated as though it were a clinical report whose sole meaning is that Paul was afflicted with epilepsy. It has been treated as a textbook on psychology, normal and abnormal.

Among the multitude of aspects of this endlessly debated conversion which have permanent suggestiveness is Paul's use of the personal pronoun "who" in addressing the blinding light which shone around him. It was natural and easy for Paul to think of a mystery in personal terms and say "*Who art thou.*" Paul was a Jew; he had a heritage of monotheism; to him as to his ancestors the ultimate reality was a personal God. Moreover, it was part of the thought-forms of the world of his time to conceive of mysteries in terms of personal power and forces.

Such response, such spontaneous use of the pronoun "who," was far more inevitable and easy than it is today when our universe is measured by the yardstick of a hundred and fifty million light-years to the farthest known nebulae. In such a universe our minds are much more readily attuned to "what" than to "who." One of the fundamental problems of religion today is, Can the pronoun "who," as applied

to the ultimate in the universe, be carried across the centuries? Can it be used in this universe of unthinkable magnitudes?

W. A. Visser t'Hooft has put this difficulty sharply. "It is hard," he writes, "for the depersonalized men and women of the twentieth century who think in terms of law and idea to accept it as a fact that in the last resort truth comes to us in the form of a person. It is hard for the relativistic modern to believe that God should have spoken in time and space, and that there is one point in history which is not merely an event in the endless chain of events, but the very center of history." ⁵

It is a hard question — How can people in this bewildering, measureless universe say "who" to its ultimate reality? Anyone who has never felt this difficulty has never really opened his eyes on his world. But in answer to this question two truths based on broad human experience may be recalled.

The first is that no word other than "who" has satisfied man's deeply implanted religious capacity. There is profound point in the French saying, "*Religion sans Dieu? Quelle religion!*" What a religion indeed, a religion without God! All the experiments in religions without God have only stressed the point of the exclamation. The persistent reach of man's spirit for the Other behind the veil of the world expresses itself most poignantly in the word "who." Man's longing takes no account of the infinitely enlarged dimensions of space. Indeed it seems that the more staggering the universe becomes, the more wistful becomes the reach of the spirit for a personal God. Eugene O'Neill, in *Strange Interlude*, expresses this feeling in the words of Nina: "Do you know what I was doing upstairs? I was trying to pray. I tried hard to pray to the modern science God. I thought of a million light-years to a spiral nebula — one other universe

among innumerable others. But how could that God care about our trifling misery of death-born-of-mirth? I couldn't believe in him, and I wouldn't if I could. I'd rather imitate his indifference and prove that I had that one trait at least in common." 6

One other truth won from experience remains constant. The most satisfying answer to man's hunger for security and fulfillment has come through a person. In unnumbered cases it has paralleled the question and answer on the Damascus road, "Who art thou, Lord?" "I am Jesus." Jesus meets our experience at so many points. He meets it in that dim borderland where our reach exceeds our grasp. Our inability to find fulfillment in material things, as do other creatures on earth, is mortised into Jesus' revelation of God in whom our fragmentary being is complete. Our dissatisfaction with ourselves, our inescapable sense of missing the mark, fits in with Jesus' own demonstration, not merely of the life we are meant for, but of the possibility of forgiveness and of a life made over. Our experience of the self-defeating character of selfishness fits into Jesus' call to fulfillment in service. The answer to the question "who" in Jesus has the quality of compulsion.

"There blew a horn in Bethlehem.
Christ sat on Mary's knee.
'And oh,' she said, 'my child,' she said,
'They blow that horn for Thee.
For Thou shalt hunt the heart of man,
Thy prey, from hole to hole —
Till at the last Thy little hands
Shall close upon his soul.' " 7

THE HUMAN NETWORK IN PAUL'S CONVERSION

*A certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias.
. . . Inquire in the . . . house of Judas for one
named Saul.*
ACTS 9:10-11

One of the many fascinating aspects of the conversion of Paul is the extent to which we can see the network of human lives behind the great result of that personality turned in a new direction. It is one of the most striking instances of the truth that in the background of every great human event there is an intricate weaving of other lives. We can easily see the shining event; we do not always or often glimpse the personal channels along which came the influences contributing to the total result. It is like the network of electric wires obscured behind gleaming light, or the ramifying roots beneath a tree.

Here in the narrative we catch a glimpse of those interlaced lives which played their indispensable part in the transformation of Saul into Paul, the Christian and apostle. There were the people who led him to Damascus; Judas, in whose house he found hospitality; Ananias, who came with brotherly hands of help; the unnamed disciples among whom he spent "certain days." And back of all this company, surely, the remembrance of Stephen. These people were the bridge over which Paul passed from the old life to the new. The high point in many old-fashioned melodramas used to be the escape of the hero over a human bridge across a chasm. It is a high point in life, this bridge of other lives across which another person passes.

Charles Reade, in the opening words of his greatest novel, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, suggests the wonder of this human network: "Not a day passes over the earth, but men

and women of no note do great deeds, speak great words, and suffer noble sorrows. Of these obscure heroes, philosophers and martyrs, the greater part will never be known till that hour when many that are great shall be small, and the small great."

How different the story of Paul might have been without these people, some of them obscure, who helped the vision become the continuing reality of his life. It is sobering to remember that often when a life of great potentialities fails to fulfill them, it is not the vision which is lacking, not the shining of the light of God, but the human network, the touch of other lives at a critical time. And there is also the sobering question, Are we a real part of any human network over which others may pass from an old life to a new one?

THE MIRACLE AT DAMASCUS

*And Ananias, laying his hands upon him, said,
Brother Saul.*

ACTS 9:17

We are accustomed to think of Paul's conversion as being the result of a miracle. There is danger that as we think of that great event, our thought may be so much blinded by the white light on the Damascus road that we may overlook the other miracle at Damascus — the stupendous miracle of Ananias stretching out his hands in forgiveness and welcome, addressing as "brother" the feared and hated persecutor from whom the Christian disciples had suffered terrible wrong. That was a spiritual miracle in no sense minor. The overcoming of antipathy and resentment, the words of love spoken to an enemy — such was at the beginning, is now and ever shall be, the high major miracle of Christianity.

It was a miracle crucial in its timeliness and necessity.

Saul's old career had been stopped in full flight; the new one had not yet begun. Saul was wandering dazed between two worlds. Had he not been given any demonstration of the Christian spirit, who can say what might have happened? In the outstretched hand of Ananias lay the future of Paul and his service to Christ. It was a creative handclasp. Ananias' word "brother" was a word of authentic magic; it was the open sesame to a new world for Paul, and for the Christian church. It was Paul's first experience of that love of which he was later to write that it "faileth never." It did not fail then.

It was a miracle as shining as the light on the road. It always is. When that miracle has failed in situations which called desperately for it, what tragedies have followed! How many returning prodigals have there been who met on the steps of the Father's house some hard, censorious, unforgiving elder brother and were turned back. The tragedy of our world today is largely the projection of the tragedy of the Versailles conference, where no one pronounced the word brother.

Nothing else is adequate to human need, only that word brother. Other words without number are spoken — with no effect. General Smuts' biographer describes one of these other attitudes when she says of her subject that "the expression of his good will is intellectual. He overlooks the individual. . . . Man is not a person to be loved. He is a problem to be solved." ⁸

Men magnify grotesquely and cruelly the differences and distances between themselves and other men. Carlyle will serve as an illustration. On one occasion Emerson disagreed quietly with Carlyle's view of Cromwell. "Carlyle would not be crossed. With his gnarled peasant finger he made an imperative gesture across the surface of the table which lay between himself and Emerson, and said with a terrible fierce-

ness: 'Then, sir, there is a line of separation between you and me as wide as that, and as deep as the pit.'"⁹ Carlyle is just a comic figure in this scene. But his words represent innumerable tragedies in which gaps "as deep as the pit" have been dug between men and between peoples.

Today the world is literally dying for want of the miracle-working word brother. An essayist has recently referred to "the undercurrent of hate which prevails in every boarding-house." Hate certainly prevails in the earth's international boardinghouse. The factors most evident in the world are those which spell division in every department of life, social, economic, international, interracial, even religious. Nothing but the miracle of Damascus can save us.

NEW EYES FOR OLD

And straightway there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he received his sight. ACTS 9:18

Paul got more than his old eyes back. He got new eyes, eyes with a farther range, a sharper focus, a deeper penetration. The gift of the Holy Spirit makes itself felt in the increase of the seeing power of the eye. To say this is, of course, to interpret figuratively as well as literally the words, "he received his sight." And perhaps the passage itself carries some suggestion of the enlightenment of Paul's spiritual blindness. At all events, there is no doubt about the history. After his conversion Paul looked out on the world with new eyes.

There is an old tradition that the apostle Paul had weak eyes. But how far they could look! Across the seas, across the years, across the fences of nationality which formerly towered so high.

It is worth pondering that the scales which fell from his eyes as he returned to the world a disciple of Jesus, were the very same scales which hang so heavily before the eyes of men today — the scales of prejudice, of pride, of privilege and class and race, the scales of nationalism, which limit our range of sight and distort our vision. The surest evidence of the gift of the Holy Spirit is the dropping of those scales from the eyes. The deepest need of our time is that those scales be removed.

One of the fascinating undertakings of psychology and medicine in recent years has been the exploration of the effect of defective vision on character and personality. The danger, for instance, that a nearsighted child may develop into an introvert and a farsighted child into an extrovert, has been carefully observed. The nearsighted child is handicapped in sports and is likely to take refuge in reading and in himself and his own fancies. The farsighted child is handicapped in his school work and is likely to be labeled as stupid. Thus unfortunate personality traits may be closely related to vision.¹⁰

That truth is symbol of another truth, that what our eyes see as they look out on the world is closely related to the kind of person we are. Eyes that see far and deep into life are both an effect and a measure of the Christ-centered and Christ-filled personality. That inner revolution in Paul which we call his conversion, that unification of his life around a new center, Christ, gave strange new powers to his eyes. He could see God manifest in the life of a Gentile — an utterly new power. He could see in history a meaning to which he had been blind before. He could see human need with a sharp focus when before it had been thickly blurred.

Robert Lynd records the significant change that appeared in the work of the novelist Arnold Bennett after Bennett went to Paris to write. "He had already steeped himself in

French fiction; but now, instead of reading French novelists through the eyes of a Five Townsman, he began to look at the Five Towns through the eyes of a French novelist.”¹¹ The first result of that new point of view was *The Old Wives Tale*, one of the great novels of the twentieth century. That was an artistic conversion, a new birth of sight. So Paul, instead of looking at Christ and at the world through the eyes of a narrow, bigoted, provincial Jew, began to look at the world through the eyes of Christ.

RELIGION'S FEAR OF ALLIES

*They were afraid of him, not believing he was a
disciple.*

ACTS 9:26

The fear which the Christian circle in Jerusalem had of the persecutor Saul was natural. He came to them with the blood of their own brothers on his hands. Yet as we look back it appears ironical that they should have feared the greatest ally the church was to receive in all its history. That bit of history from these earliest days may well be taken as a warning of a tendency which has persisted — the church's fear of potential allies, which has led it to reject assets of measureless worth to its cause.

How often has the church retreated in terror before forces, tendencies, movements, discoveries that could have been tremendous allies. It has feared new knowledge in science — in a Galileo, a Bruno, a Darwin, a score of others. It has struck out in blind panic, lighting the fires of persecution, sometimes using the weapon of murder, trying again and again to crush by physical might the truth which was in reality a powerful ally. For a long time the church feared the historical study of the Scriptures. It greeted with consternation and jittery

apprehension new tools for accomplishing the Christian purpose. It often scorned art and music, and in some places regarded even the gentle reed organ as an instrument of Satan! It feared the dawning of social conscience in the first laws protecting labor. It has congealed in fright at any form of socialism, blind to the ally which socialism might have been in the realization of its ideals of brotherhood and justice.

Santayana has said that "those who ignore the past are doomed to repeat it." If we ignore this history of refusal we are likely to repeat the blunders of yesterday. Much has been written in the years since the World War of the ossifying effect of military training in that it makes men unfitted to deal with new problems. With deep humility we should face the question whether ecclesiastical training has not also an ossifying effect. There seems to be evidence of some sinister "ossification" in the ecclesiastically trained which prevents their recognizing allies of Kingdom purposes and ends when they appear. For today a large section of the church fears a most obvious ally in the struggle for human welfare — labor. The church at large has not yet realized that a strong labor movement is an indispensable tool for shaping a more Christian society. A large part of the church disdains another ally in the cause of the Prince of Peace, the pacifist movement. And a dominating section fears the movement toward increasing social control of the common wealth for the sake of genuine democracy and justice.

This is all the more tragic when we consider the alliances which the church as an institution has welcomed with open arms. It has welcomed the state as an ally — only to find the chains of base servitude around its neck. It has welcomed a dominant economic class as an ally — only to become the mouthpiece of an owning group, a mere appendage to something other than itself.

The Christian group in Jerusalem did not permanently

reject Paul. They were open to persuasion. They came to see that he belonged in their ranks. They came to recognize the help he brought. Such recognition of the potential allies of the kingdom of God is today one of the most urgent needs of the church and the world.

INTERNATIONAL LADIES' GARMENT WORKERS' UNION

*And the widows stood by him weeping and showing
the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she
was with them.*

ACTS 9:39

Dorcas was the founder of an International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, one of the greatest labor unions of all time, with branches in all lands. The rate of pay has been small, the hours long, but the union has never gone on strike. Otherwise it has been a highly successful craft union in the needle trades. Indeed, so great a part has this union of women played here in America that Dorcas seems more like a character in New England than in Palestinian history. There is high drama and pathos in the words, "showing the coats and garments" — those eloquent memorials of a life of love. What a collection it would be if the coats and garments made by all the Dorcas societies of all these years could be assembled! What a record of all the changes of style and of the costumes of all climes! Those garments are recorded somewhere in a grand inventory.

The legacy of Dorcas is an inward history as well as an outward one of flying needles. Elizabeth Fry, the Quaker ambassadress of God to those who were in prison in early nineteenth century England, describes that inward history in recording her first prickings of conscience over her life of

privilege in the midst of need. She wrote, "I feel like a contemptible fine lady, all outside, no inside." A great many "fine ladies" have ceased being "contemptible" by getting outside of themselves and inside of others' needs, thus discovering and developing a new "inside" for themselves. It sounds like a contortionist's trick, but it is a marvelous trick for making a more Christian life.

There is eternal need of this Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, a union of heart to feel and hand to do. Our day needs to carry the spirit of Dorcas beyond the immediate and obvious task of supplying garments into the wider issues of social housekeeping, that justice may displace the obvious charity of clothes-dispensing. Our day must express Christian love, not by merely passing out garments and jellies, but by securing a fairer share of the world's wealth for the workers who so largely create it.

THE EDUCATION OF AN APOSTLE

*And it came to pass, that he abode many days in
Joppa with one Simon, a tanner.* ACTS 9:43

When we speak of the education of the apostle Paul our minds readily fasten on his words, "brought up at the feet of Gamaliel." Such is the account in the record of his formal education. The extent of Paul's contact with Gamaliel is a matter of debate among scholars, but his epistles do give evidence of some rabbinical training. Yet that formal education was a small part in the training of the apostle. Acts makes it clear that much of the education of Paul and Peter as Christian apostles came from plain and humble people with whom they stayed as guests. What a company they were! Simon, a tanner, with whom Peter lodged and on

the top of whose house he had his vision; Aquila and Priscilla and Lydia; Judas, whose door swung open to receive Paul at Damascus; Jason, who went security for Paul at Thessalonica; Titus Justus, his host at Corinth; Philip in Caesarea; Nason of Cyprus, with whom Paul lodged in Jerusalem; the brethren with whom he stayed at Puteoli after landing in Italy.

It was from people that he learned much of the mysteries of grace — from those, as Chesterton says, “to whom we owe the chairs we sit on, the clothes we wear, the houses we live in . . . the largest and probably the most valuable class.” It was this Christian fellowship of the tanners, the tentmakers, the butchers, the bakers, the candlestick makers, which was the faculty of Christian education. It is always the most capable faculty. Paul did exactly what Goethe later counseled, he “plunged his hand into the thick of average human nature.” He learned from men what could never be learned from books. In these lives the truth of Christ found a local habitation and a long, shining catalog of names.

In tribute to John Masefield it has been said that he “helped take poetry away from its conventional elevation and bring it everywhere poignantly in contact with throbbing life.” That is what Paul does supremely in his epistles; he takes religion away from “conventional elevation” and brings it into touch with the throb of life. He did not learn to do that in a rabbinical school. He learned much of it from people. Into single glowing sentences there went the fruit of years of living with Judas, with Justus, with an unnumbered company of artisans along his road of pilgrimage.

Only through that sort of education does religion ever become and stay real.

A great danger for the church today is that it may not plunge its hand into the thick of human nature. Hold in contrast two words from the same city. The first pictures a

Christianity gasping its life away, dying of infection. At the reopening of St. Paul's Cathedral after its renovation a few years ago, a London newspaper spoke of it in an editorial as "a proud assertion of the national, the imperial religion," and of "its intimate connection with trade, commerce, government." Against this epitaph, place the picture of Christianity renewing its life in contact with people: "Perhaps it is good enough for any of us, child or grownup, to have the honor of living in a poor district, where people have that toleration which comes from facing day after day the stark-naked realities of life, death and hunger; where astounding generosity is scarcely noticed because it is so natural; where no one says the things he does not mean nor pretends to be what he is not; where courage and humor and patience and absurd irrational hope are woven into the very pattern of life; where Christ is daily manifested through suffering, love and service."¹²

LEARNING FROM OUTSIDERS

*Now there was a certain man in Caesarea, Cornelius
by name.*

ACTS 10:1

This story of Cornelius and Peter and of the part Cornelius played in freeing Christianity from the straitjacket of Jewish legalism suggests many thoughts. One is that an apostle might learn from outsiders. Peter had much to learn from the Gentile Cornelius. Cornelius was a rank outsider according to Jewish standards. Yet it was from him that Peter learned many things about the nature of his own message, central, elemental facts about the universal significance of Christ which he had never learned from the inside group of the Jewish Christians.

The whole narrative clearly intimates that a church must keep on learning about its world, its task and its gospel from different groups altogether outside its walls. That method of learning is hard, and the churches have again and again conspicuously failed at it.

The liabilities which churches face in this respect are both universal and particular; some they share with any group, some are their own peculiar dangers as religious groups. Any group tends to become parochial unless it maintains, at large expense of humility and effort, roads of communication with the alien outside. If it erects walls of exclusion it is sure to find its walls turning subtly into tombstones. Trevelyan's life of Lord Grey gives a notable picture of such a tragedy. Grey desired to live aloof from all knowledge and persons except those of his own choosing. He made little attempt to keep abreast of European thought. That proved to be a disaster for England, for Europe and for the world. For twenty years he lived behind the fences of a little mutual admiration society known as "liberal imperialism." These friendships were his horizon — and they were accidental.¹³

Parochialism is aggravated in a religious group such as a church. Theoretically, belief in a universal God generates attitudes of broad-minded fellowship. Sometimes, thank God, it actually does, but often it raises the fences higher. It gives those who hold it a specious idea that they possess final truth. Partial insights and temporary customs are elevated into universal truths. Jesus waged unceasing war against ecclesiastical parochialism: "Publicans and harlots shall go into the kingdom of God before you." "God can raise up from these stones children to Abraham."

It is the saving function of the outsider to make clear to insiders that there are marvelous works of God beyond their little systems. That was one thing Cornelius did for Peter. He raised in his own person the shattering question, What about the man of faith and godly life clear outside the fence?

The only logical answer to that question was to tear down the fence. We can hear the fence beginning to topple in Peter's conclusion, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?" (Acts 10:47) "These" refers to outsiders, the Gentiles.

Outsiders have performed another saving service by saying effectively to insiders, "You are missing great human needs. With your eyes turned inward, and your ears filled with the chanting of your own ritual, you do not hear God speaking through need."

The church needs contact with the great mass of men if it is to speak in the language of humanity, if it is to speak to and for people. William Butler Yeats prays with deep wisdom:

"God guard me from those thoughts men think
In the mind alone.
He that sings a lasting song
Thinks in a marrow bone."

Jesus thought "in a marrow bone." He was the friend of sinners; he was always out of bounds. His followers, if in any way they are to "sing a lasting song," must know the marrow bone of life. They must persistently explore personality.

The church has lessons to learn from outsiders today. How much it can learn from communism, for instance, if it can forget its hysteria long enough to listen. We may reject communism's crude dogmatism, its atheism, its repression of liberty of thought, its deification of economic determinism. But unless Christianity learns deeply from communism's warfare on private economic power, from its vision of cooperation, it will be blind to the signs of the times.

The church desperately needs to learn from outsiders in the labor movement. Unless it can bring to the appraisal of today's labor struggles a more adequate instrument than

petulant irritation, it is doomed itself to be an outsider to the most significant chapters of contemporary history. The progress of organized labor is a new chapter in the long story of humanity's emergence from slavery into its rightful heritage. The church had better learn.

WE ARE THE PEOPLE

A devout man . . . who gave much alms to the people.
ACTS 10:2

In Jewish usage "the people" is the common term for the Jewish people. That usage grew to be natural and unconscious. Here it comes incidentally into the narrative. Yet it stands in a real way for an underlying religious and racial self-esteem, bigotry and snobbishness. It is a very small hole from which to look out on a large landscape. It is like saying, "We are the ones that really count." Moffatt, in his translation, capitalizes "people," thus making it clear that the word means not people in general but the Jewish People.

A small thing, perhaps, this thinking of themselves as the People; yet it is a genuine instance of a vicious evil — putting capital letters in the wrong place. That sin is always committed when the universal is particularized and capitalized. "We are the People" — those words always throw open the Pandora's box of immeasurable evil and disaster.

Our frightened world needs no labored argument on that point. The self-conscious feeling of national, religious and racial groups that they alone are the people who count, is the fountainhead of the world's flood of woe. It is the source of nationalism's false values. Sir Norman Angell thus describes this we-are-the-People complex:

"The ultimate outcome will depend upon whether any sanity at all can modify the nationalist scale of values now

accepted by the world. The world over the nationalist has a scale of values which might be indicated thus: 'Rather than that one peasant now under our rule shall pass to foreign rule, even though that rule be better than our own, we will see a million of our people perish on the battlefield. Rather than yield one acre of our land, though it be but worthless barren rock, we will see the world in agony, and all justice, all mercy, all pity, all decency perish from the earth.' So long as that is our scale of values, as, in fact, it is with the nationalist, there can be no peace and, of course, civilization must perish."¹⁴

It is a strange irony that the Jews, who had this "People" consciousness in an accentuated form, should suffer most cruelly through it. Yet racial bigotry was not made in Germany. Hardly a day passes that it is not expressed, with an arrogance so deep as to be quite unconscious, by Englishmen. Here is Lady Astor, for instance, stepping off the ship which brought her to America a short time ago, giving her philosophy of history to the reporters: "Look at Russia, Germany, Italy, Spain — and France is nothing to write home about. These peoples have never read the Bible as we have in Anglo-Saxon countries. It is that which forms the character of the Anglo-Saxon people and their way of thinking."¹⁵ Match this with Lord Beaverbrook, reported in his own London *Daily Express*:

LORD BEAVERBROOK. I absolutely assert that in advancing a policy of a customs union in the British empire we are doing God's work.

A HEARER. When you say that you are doing God's work, does God admit that one man is a foreigner and another is his brother?

LORD BEAVERBROOK. Certainly. Why did God raise up the British empire? Why did God raise up the Israelites?

Why has God maintained the British empire during the tempests and trials of centuries? Why has God made us the greatest, finest, and most powerful people in the world? (*Loud applause.*)

As for America, volumes could be easily compiled, giving the American version of Hebrews 1:1: "God having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners hath at the end of these days spoken in the marvelous achievements of the American People."

There is also a distinctively religious version of this vicious we-are-the-People fallacy, in which all others are allowed a small peep at truth, comparable to the leper's squint in European cathedrals. Here racial snobbery is coupled with religious pride. Sidney Lanier powerfully satirizes this attitude:

"Thou shalt not sit by as to break thy fast
Save to our rubric thou subscribe and swear.
Religion hath blue eyes and yellow hair,
She's Saxon all."

Social snobbery is always with us. In its most familiar form it provides generous material for humor. We smile at the verdict of the elect ladies of Salem, Massachusetts, on Hawthorne: "Who ever heard of the Hawthornes?" We chuckle raucously at the noble Lord Curzon who, on a visit to the front during the war, watched a company of soldiers taking their showers and said with surprise, as though a new planet had swung into his ken, "Dear me, I had no conception the lower classes had such white skins."¹⁶ But in its more serious forms social snobbery is a deadly blight on mankind.

The only hope is in escaping from the bigoted provincialism of B.C. into the universalism of A.D.

I HAVE NEVER

But Peter said, Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. ACTS 10:14

These three words, "I have never," so perfectly picture a mind paralyzed by custom that it is no wonder that they have been preached on time and again. There is eternal need that they be brought squarely before us, as a mirror in which we may see ourselves and the danger of bondage to habit and tradition.

The words echo down the centuries and the present day catches their reverberations. It is startlingly clear that on the housetop the authority of custom and habit was higher with Peter than a fresh vision of God. To the man whose mind turns on an "I have never," fresh revelations of God are always of minor authority. In that vision God was breaking the mold of tradition. But in Peter tradition was not easy to break, for it had the solidity of rock. His was a highly geological state of mind.

In our universities there is a department of economic geology. No department of geological economics is ever listed — not by that name. Yet economics is often completely geological, so solidified into an "I have never" tradition that a world convulsion which explodes the dogmas of classical economics all over the map does not disturb the devotion of the economists among the ruins.

No area of history has a more pathetic humor than resistance to any sort of change. And just as was the case with Peter, religion has been used as the sanction for resistance to change. Vaccination was opposed for years as a blasphemy against God. What if the scourge of smallpox might be averted? "I have never" was a sufficient answer. In his masterly argument for vaccination, Sir James Y. Simpson in 1847 used these striking words:

“Some day a canal will in all probability be made through the Isthmus of Panama. . . . When this proposal was made in the sixteenth century, a priest by the name of Ascost brought forward the following reason against it: ‘I am of the opinion that human power should not be allowed to cut through the strong and impenetrable bounds which God has put between the two oceans, of mountains and iron rocks, which can withstand the fury of the raging seas. And, if it were possible, it would appear to me very just that we should fear the vengeance of heaven for attempting to improve that which the Creator in his almighty will and providence has ordained from the creation of the world.’ ”¹⁷

No records are more full of “I have never” blindness than those of military history. One instance will stand for many. An immortal bureaucrat in the British war office in 1912 received an inventor’s plans for a tank. He condescended to examine them, then wrote on them, “The man’s mad,” and filed them away.¹⁸

So today multitudes of people look out on a world in which the machinery has jammed, and instead of making even a casual effort to understand the problems of bringing our social and economic thinking into harmony with the collectivist realities of our material world, they mutter blandly, “I have never.” The mind-binding disease is well analyzed and described in connection with the field of literary criticism by William C. Brownell: “He never grew with his times. His standards never altered or enlarged, and became oppressive; his susceptibility to fresh artistic impulses was meager.” Just that can happen to any of us in any field of living.

John Locke is still very much in date when he writes in his *Essay concerning Human Understanding*: “It is a duty we owe to God . . . to have our minds constantly disposed to entertain and receive truth wheresoever we meet with it. . . . Our first and great duty then is to bring to our studies

and to our inquiries after knowledge a mind covetous of truth.”

This narrative in Acts not only gives a picture of the “I have never” disease, but is an inspiring case history of a cure. From his initial resistance to a new idea, Peter moved on to an enlargement of mind. The word of God was brought into contact with the concrete situation, in this case the man Cornelius. When Peter allowed the specific case to be lit up by the general truth, he put himself on the line of discovery.

FROM PERPLEXITY TO LIGHT

Now while Peter was much perplexed in himself what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold the men that were sent by Cornelius . . . stood before the gate.

ACTS 10:17

From this point to the end of the tenth chapter, culminating with the baptism of Cornelius and other Gentiles, the narrative has profound and permanent meaning.

After the vision on the housetop, Peter was deeply perplexed. The foundations of his whole mental and spiritual world had been set swaying. But as he went down from the housetop he was confronted by the messengers from the Gentile Cornelius. Here was the first particular situation on which the revelation of the vision bore. Peter opened his mind to the leading of concrete experience. The steps by which he made the journey to clear assurance are readily traced. First of all he called in the messengers of Cornelius and had them stay all night. Then he set out on the path of discovery. He went to Cornelius, he exposed his whole soul to the meaning of a man who undoubtedly had experience of God. Through the interaction of his positive deed

and the truth which he had but dimly grasped before the deed, he reached light.

Perplexities are rarely cleared up by logic or abstract thinking. The historian Ernest Troeltsch has put this fact in unmistakable terms: "It is that living wrestling of the Christian view with actual conditions through which the conceptions of the New Testament receive fresh illumination and disclose new depth of meaning in every age."

The pathway by which the first disciples of Jesus traveled toward a fuller understanding was the path of concrete experience clearing perplexity. The disciples began with a very simple fact. Here was a person, Jesus, a fact in their daily lives. He said, "Follow me," and they followed him. But they could not keep their eyes on that person; he had a way of turning them back on themselves. They were faced, not merely with an attractive person, but with an uncomfortable challenge.

We travel from perplexity to light by meeting the concrete opportunities to apply the baffling truth. We do not evolve new arguments; rather we make discoveries of the positive good of life. It is the difference between thinking and living. Carl Van Doren, in his autobiography, draws the distinction: "If this were fiction, I might say that I went into a retreat to think things out. It still is history. I have never in my life thought things out nor have I known anybody who ever did. I have always had to live them out, thinking as I went along."¹⁹

It may be said truly that perplexity is a healthy mental state. Yet we often make it a sterile state of mind and a disastrously permanent one. We live in a puzzling age, but there is no need for a permanent fixation at the "isn't it baffling?" point. Peter might well have remained in a condition of paralyzing bafflement had he not seized the first opportunity for action.

BREAD AS A BARRIER TO FELLOWSHIP

You yourselves know how it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to join himself or come into one of another nation.

ACTS 10:28

The real point at issue here is eating with a Gentile. It was just that breaking of a taboo about food which was the charge later made against Peter at Jerusalem. Cadbury and Lake call attention to this point. "It is easy," they say, "to overlook the fact that this was an immediate contention at the beginning of the Judaistic controversy, not the question of preaching to the Gentiles. After all, provided that the substance of the preaching was right, there was no reason why any missionary, Jewish or Christian, should not try to convert the heathen. It was quite a different thing if the missionary ate with his hearers."²⁰

Here, then, as a perfectly understandable survival of Jewish ritual practice, is one of the first instances in Christian history of a scandal continued through the centuries — bread as a barrier to fellowship. There is a terrible irony about it, for bread, in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, has become a sacred symbol of fellowship. Yet that very symbol has often been, and with some branches of the church still is, a source of frightful division. That breaking of fellowship over the breaking of bread is not only a scandal but also a sign of an impotent church, unable to achieve union in the face of a staggering need for it. Refusal to take bread with fellow Christians is the sign of a rocklike dogmatism which elevates tradition above fellowship and the kingdom of God. So long as that remains, Christian unity will remain where it is now, in the realm of empty chatter.

Another scandal and irony is that bread has been and is a high barrier to fellowship across race lines. The one thing

which many Christians will not do is to eat with Negroes. They will sing with Negroes, sit with them, share many things with them. The ultimate barrier is bread. Such people are like Peter before his response to the vision. The social taboo is stronger than Christian fellowship.

One instance of the power of this taboo, this barrier of bread, was the action of a woman's club in a Chicago suburb, which wished to have Countee Cullen, the Negro poet, come and read his poems. They finally canceled the engagement, because it was their custom to give tea to their speakers and they felt they could not do that with Mr. Cullen. One person commented in parody:

“ Poems are made by fools like me
But only God can come to tea.”

A consequence of this fractional practice of fellowship on the part of so many Christians is the bitter rejection of Christianity by many Negro intellectuals. Typical of this response are the verses of Langston Hughes — shocking verses, but they should be faced as a consequence of an inadequate Christianity:

“ Listen, Christ,
You did all right in your day, I reckon,
But that day's gone now.
They ghosted you up a swell story, too,
Called it Bible —
But it's dead now.”²¹

GOD HAS NO FAVORITES

Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him.

ACTS 10:34-35

The words mean literally, "God is no accepter of faces." Moffatt translates them freely but accurately, "God has no favorites." Both these translations have acquired a fresh and somewhat terrible timeliness in our day. It is good to be reminded that God is no "accepter of faces," because we tend so readily to accept impressive faces.

We accept the proud face. Organized Christianity has often been browbeaten out of loyalty to its charter by the face of political or economic power. Recall the history of the economic basis of the attitudes toward human slavery of multitudes within the churches. Arnold Buffom, for instance, was read out of the Friends' Society because of his activity in the New England Antislavery Society.²² The Quakers had developed economic ties with the slave power and had lost their noble intransigence. If the warning of that particular bit of history has grown dim, we can find fresher warning in the life of Lucretia Mott. Some parts of this story of the docile "accepting" of the face of power can be read in the attitudes of many within the church toward labor and toward the civil liberties of minority groups.

We are prone to accept the "tough" face. The toughest face in our world today is that of militarism. In some quarters the drill sergeant has become the mentor of the churches, the final authority on what Jesus said and meant. Yes, it is good to be reminded that God is no accepter of faces.

The other translation, "God has no favorites," is equally

in season. For the church has often developed a sort of amnesia about these words. Do we not often feel, if indeed we do not say it crudely, that God does have favorites — his favorite denomination, to which we belong? This inner sense that we are favorites can go side by side with formal expressions of broad catholicity. Coleridge once said that “our greatest mission is to rescue admitted truths from the neglect caused by their universal admission.” Scott’s *Old Mortality* has an unforgettable picture of the old man whose self-imposed task it was, chisel in hand, to clear the mold of neglect from the gravestones of the covenanters. This truth that “God has no favorites, but that he who reverences him and lives a good life in any nation is welcomed by him,” needs to be saved from its universal admission. It needs a determined company of people who will clear the mold from its gravestone.

CORE AND FLEXIBILITY IN THE MESSAGE

He is the Lord of all. ACTS 10:36

Peter’s address to Cornelius (Acts 10:34–43), compared with other addresses given primarily to Jews, well illustrates a twin aspect of apostolic preaching — its core and flexibility. To the Gentile Cornelius, Peter stresses the universal God of the whole human family. To the Jews, on the other hand, he stresses Jesus as the fulfillment of the history of Israel and its messianic prophecy. Always the same core of truth, but with a particular relevance to a particular group and situation.

There is no duplicity in this varying emphasis. We are all familiar with the classic defense of the liar, that he did not really lie but merely “presented different aspects of the truth to different people.” Those suave words have often been the inglorious motto of the double-dealer. But those same words,

used honestly and sincerely, may also represent the only effective method of presenting the wide-ranging truth of a message of universal applicability. Paul, as well as Peter, expresses and exemplifies this union of core and flexibility in first century Christian teaching. "To the Greek," he says, "I became a Greek; to the Jews, a Jew. I became all things to all men, that by any means I might save some."

Those words need to be held well in remembrance by all engaged in the Christian task of preaching a changeless gospel in and to a changing world. Some of the greatest failures to "buy up the opportunity" of the succeeding centuries can be traced to a lack either of the eternal core of the Christian message, or of flexibility in understanding and demonstrating the relevance of the timeless truth to the temporal situation and need.

Sometimes the church has lost the core of its gospel; the historic center has been enveloped in a fog. It is not too much to say that Christianity in general, and liberal Protestantism in particular, has suffered such a loss in the last two generations. The main movements in contemporary Christian theology are concerned with a recovery of the apostolic core of the Christian message — rather with the fresh discovery (for it has been almost that in many quarters) that the gospel was not and is not a celebration of man's hopes or ideals or powers, but, as Peter puts it here, an affirmation of God.

Van Wyck Brooks tells us about the "state religion" of New England's "Golden Day." A mild and tolerant Unitarianism, rationalistic, torpid, utilitarian, had been set up as a state religion. Known far and wide as the "Boston Religion," it "still possessed a frail dogmatic structure, of which it was only conscious when challenged."²³ Ponder those words, "a frail dogmatic structure." No core!

How much optimistic Christian preaching has been marked by range rather than depth, by vigor rather than intensity, by

color rather than light, by outside sheen rather than inward solidity and apostolic content. Richard Curle, as a young writer, sent to H. G. Wells his first volume of stories. Wells acknowledged it with these words: "You are drunk with Conrad. You have got a style before you have got a story, and God help you."²⁴ A style before a story — is not that a description of at least some of our preaching and thinking? A style — oh, yes, we have that, a style exquisitely sensitive to all the changing winds of our world, colored with the freshest tints of each day's new sunrise. But we are hazy on the story.

"Nice in minutiae, careless of immensity;
Connoisseur in instant and stranger in eternity;
Accurate in hair's breadth, incurious of infinity;
Initiate of Wells, and witless of the Trinity."²⁵

Contrast with that Harnack's classic reminder of the apostolic core of the gospel: "God as the sole Creator of the universe — a conception that swept polytheism, pantheism and humanism out of the field; second, Jesus Christ as Redeemer — the restorer of the disturbed dignity and glory of man; third, the surpassing beauty of the Christian moral ideal — the worth of the individual; fourth, the future immortality of the soul — the eventual triumph of Christ."

Austin Phelps is not much read in these days, even by preachers. Yet no one ever showed clearer wisdom than he when he wrote: "Put into your pulpit the strength of the everlasting hills, and it will not need the coruscations of the aurora borealis. Give to your preaching the vividness of lightning, and your people will not crave the phosphorescence of fireflies."

Yet disaster threatens also through lack of flexibility, through failure to bring this changeless core of the message into fruitful relation to changing life. Professor Alfred North

Whitehead says, "Conventional English is the twin sister of barren thought." Merely conventional theology, no matter how orthodox, when it is snapped out with no more thought than is involved in raucous repetitions of "Polly wants a cracker," is also the twin sister of barren thought — and of barren action. Truth becomes creative in each generation only when it is adapted to fresh and changing needs. Commenting on "Casabianca," which held up a shining example of filial obedience to our parents' generation, Professor Harry A. Overstreet said that the boy who stood on the burning deck is not a hero whose inflexible immobility is always to be emulated, but rather a person who didn't have gumption enough to adapt himself to a changing situation. That, too, is an apostolic virtue — gumption to become adapted to a changing situation.

IN A WORLD OF DEMONIC POWERS

Healing all that were oppressed of the devil.

ACTS 10:38

On these words, Lake and Cadbury comment: "It is scarcely possible to overemphasize the extent to which Jesus appeared to his immediate followers as the great conqueror of the devil and of demons. Not chiefly as a preacher of good conduct and high ethics — of which neither the Jewish nor the heathen world was ignorant — but as the triumphant conqueror over the source of evil does he appear in the synoptic Gospels. Still more is this true of Acts, the speeches in which must at least be regarded as representing the message about Jesus which the apostles were supposed to have delivered." ²⁶

These, surely, are words which bring into view a strange, far-off world. Jesus lived and taught, as did the apostles, in

a world the minds of whose people were demon-ridden. They regarded mental and physical diseases as seizures by devils and evil spirits. They looked upon the cures made by Jesus as exorcisms of demons and as supreme manifestations of divine power. Between this world of superstition and fear — a sort of shadow land where ghosts and evil spirits walked as familiar figures — and our day of mental hygiene and scientific medicine, a great gulf is fixed.

Yet any mood of complacency which may arise from that consideration is rudely interrupted by that word "demon." Is our civilization so free from the preying of "demons," after all? Some of our keenest observers do not think so. They have much to say of the demonic forces of our time.

Like the men of Paul's day, we too struggle not alone against powers and principalities, but against "the dark powers of this present world." One particular form of demonic power sits on our time like a nightmare, nonmaterial, mysterious, sinister. Where a political state, for instance, is regarded as worthy of absolute reverence, obedience, self-sacrifice, where it becomes an absolute end, there a demonic force is at work. In that real sense we are in a demon-ridden world, wherein totalitarianism, military might and profit are sanctified and made sacred.

It is with power to cast out demons that Jesus must come if he is to come as the Savior of our world. Can he cast out the evil spirits of state worship, of the religion of profit-making? Or perhaps we should rather ask, Will we allow him to work his miracle of exorcism, or will it be written of the world of today, as it was written of a certain Galilean village, "He could do no mighty works in that place because of their unbelief"?

Gerald Heard shows us a symbol of the exorcising of the evil spirits that haunt and damn our world. Describing Balfour's taking over of the British admiralty office he says:

“ Arthur Balfour’s one ‘gesture’ on taking his dramatic predecessor’s room of office was to pitch out of the window a small bust of Napoleon which had been left there.”²⁷

A medieval formula for exorcism has been preserved for us:

“ By that unspoken name of dread
The Tetragrammaton of God,
Let you tremble, let you groan.
I exorcise you, Ghosts and Fauns,
Goblins, Sirens, Nymphs, and Dryads,
Satyrs, Nightmares, Household Gods.
Swift to Chaos get you gone,
And no more trouble Christendom

“ And do Thou, O God, vouchsafe to keep us from our foes.”²⁸

Exorcism of the evil spirits that possess it is the central issue in our world, but only Christ can say to those goblins, nightmares and household gods, “ Swift to chaos get you gone.” The words themselves have no Oriental magic. Only as we offer to God minds which are the instruments of his spirit can we say with any authority to demons, “ No more trouble Christendom.”

THE GIFT OF TONGUES

For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.
ACTS 10:46

The subject of the gift of tongues in the early church is a dark and tangled thicket which will doubtless never be completely cleared. Countless explorations of it have been conducted, with increasing psychological and historical equipment. Yet it is still a good deal of a dark jungle. No sharp answer comes

to the question, What exactly — physically, mentally, spiritually — was the phenomenon known as the gift of tongues?

Yet within that jungle there are clearings where our generation may sit down to look. This, among other things, is clear: the experience and conviction of those who accepted the Christian evangel did release them. They were caught up out of themselves into a new experience; they were absorbed into a new cause. Their tongues were loosed as they had never been loosed before; they had more to say; they had a new freedom in saying it. That much, at least, is not a strange, first century curiosity. It is a profound truth that manifests itself in every century.

Drop down into the nineteenth century and watch this timeless truth at work. Their devotion to the cause of anti-slavery brought to many of the greatest poets and prose writers of mid-nineteenth century America an authentic gift of tongues. A great cause released in them a new power of words, carried them on to a finer, fuller art. Van Wyck Brooks has described what happened, and he is so affected by his tale that his own words literally sing: "In this abolitionist campaign . . . the orators especially had found a cause. They were in need of a cause, for the tale of the Revolution had grown rather stale, flat and thin. . . . The ancient art of oratory, the pride of ancestral Boston, had become an abuse. It was breathing out its vacant life in words, empty as a cloud, cold as the frozen Frog Pond; and suddenly, as if by a blood transfusion, its slow pulse began to beat again. Oratory once more possessed a function. It touched the springs of action, for the voices of Charles Sumner and Wendell Phillips were voices to which Boston was obliged to listen. Their doctrines, their ideas, were scarcely new. What was new was their personal style, their passion, their conviction, their sense of fact." ²⁰

The experience of these men was akin, in part at least, to

the authentic prophetic experience of such a one as Jeremiah. In Jeremiah the fight against war became "more than a stirring of conscience. It was a declaration of the enlightened reason about the folly of war." ³⁰ Here was a man battling against the dominating trends of his time, repeatedly imprisoned, yet sustained by a great faith which kindled great speech: "But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay."

Our day desperately needs that gift of tongues, that giving of wings to halting words, which comes from a divine indignation against marauding evil. The reason for much of the church's impotence in the present crisis in civilization is illustrated in a remark John Burroughs once made to Bliss Perry. Mr. Perry suggested that Burroughs write an essay on a certain topic. "I'd do it," said John Burroughs, "if only I'd get het up enough so's I could flow." Those words describe exactly, though colloquially, the realities of mental and spiritual life. "This poor lispng, stammering tongue" which the hymn speaks of is tied; it does not flow; the soul is not "het up."

General Kitchener was once vividly described as one who "had a brain packed in ice." Brains well cooled with dry ice appear far too often in pulpit and classroom and in the councils of organized religion. There is no rush of daring and impassioned speech because we are not possessed by any indignation caught from the divine. Shane Leslie speaks of the "languid and dignified indignations peculiar to the opposition in the House of Commons." "Languid indignations" — those words cuttingly describe the major difficulty of our time. They should literally send us to our knees with the question, "Lord, is it I?"

Really great poetry is poetry of inner disturbance. Really effective proclamation of religious truth comes from the same

high source — a creative ferment in the mind. Sara Field gives good advice to preachers and teachers and all spiritual leaders as well as to poets:

“ Speak no word at all
Till, hanging from the lip
Conglobed like the drop
On the leaf tip,
It finally must fall,
Too full to stop.”³¹

Those words of Acts, “ They heard them speak with tongues and manifest God,” are the prelude to any great era of redemptive action. Can they ever be written of us and of our time?

APOSTOLIC SELF-DEPRECIATION

Who was I that I could withstand God? ACTS 11:17

If more of Peter’s successors had succeeded to the spirit he showed on this occasion, when against all his inherited prejudices he admitted a Gentile to spiritual equality before God, the history of much of the world might have been different. Here was a companion of Jesus, one of the very inner circle of the new church. There was a despised barbarian. Yet Peter rises to great heights of apostolic self-depreciation and cries, “ Who was I to withstand God, when his gifts are bestowed outside of my own particular little holy back yard? ”

Peter was willing to take the evidence of experience, to look at the thing that actually happened. But ever since his day churchmen have applied other tests of worth — tests of authority, tradition, race, and class. We really warn God not to work any miracles of grace outside our familiar block

where all the best people live, outside our land where the favored of God reside, outside our superior race or class. And often, unconsciously, we warn him that we shall not recognize any illegal miracles of that sort. Peter evidently did not carry any such convenient measuring tape. Who was I, he cries, to refuse to recognize God's work in an unfamiliar setting?

Can we, as a privileged church or a privileged people, learn to say those three little genuinely holy words, "Who was I" ? It ought to be an axiom of our faith that people are not made holy by the place, but that places are made holy by the people. And who are we to mark out the limits of the city of God?

Undoubtedly the biblical figure of speech, "the sheep and the goats," has been a confusing influence that has led to spiritual arrogance and blindness to God's good in unorthodox places. We might take a lesson from the zoo, where separating the sheep from the goats is not so easy. There are too many mixtures, not easily classified on a rigid dogmatic basis even by experts.

Rudyard Kipling presents dramatically this majestic insight of Peter's in one of his last stories, "The Church at Antioch." A young Roman official, a student of Mithraism, is brought on duty into the little Christian community where Paulus and Petrus are disputing as to the rules governing the admission of Jews and Greeks to the Lord's table. The young man is treacherously slain, but as he lies dying he forgives his enemies, using almost the exact words of Jesus upon the cross. Paul, deeply moved, suggests that he be baptized, but Peter breaks in: "Think you that one who has spoken those words needs such as *we* are to certify him to any God?"³²

This same humility and open-mindedness toward the wonders of life, toward the scattering of God's gifts in what appear to us unlikely places, should be manifested in all our estimates of people. One of the noblest Christians of all time, Baron von Hügel, has written some lovely and pene-

trating words that breathe the very spirit of Peter's "Who was I": "I am struck at how the little-regarded, the very simple, unbrilliant souls — souls treated by impatient others as more or less wanting, are exactly pretty often specially enlightened by God and specially near to him. . . . Quite ordinary intelligence — real slowness of mind — will quite well do as reflections of God's light, and such limitations are more easily accompanied by simplicity, naïveté, recollection, absence of self-occupation, gratefulness, which dispositions are necessary for the soul's union with God. Such souls more easily approach action — and more easily escape activity." ³³

THE FEARS OF A RIGID ORTHODOXY

When Peter came up to Jerusalem they that were of the circumcision contended with him. ACTS 11:2

With these words the plot in the early Christian drama thickens. For they are the cue for the chief villain to stride onto the stage. The rigidly orthodox of the Judaistic party seek to kill the new thing they fear. As Leitzman says, "in the very birth hour of Christianity, a reactionary movement was started." ³⁴ The infant church had to become a baby Hercules strangling the serpents that attempted to creep into its cradle. Most venomous of the serpents was the rigid orthodoxy which, in fear for its security, struck viciously.

That same battle of newly experienced truth with a frightened privileged group has gone on continuously. But sometimes, alas, the battle is not won by a triumphant infant Hercules; it is lost by a Laocoön entangled in the serpents' coils.

The trouble was that Peter's preaching to the Gentiles and his opening of the doors of the church to them, terrified those

who still thought of Christianity in restricted terms as a Jewish sect. As Leitzman describes it, "James the leader of the church belonged at bottom to those who were strangers to Jesus, and strove for an ideal of Jewish righteousness."³⁵ Here in this group was no surprise at the strangeness of God's grace, no generous enthusiasm, no startled wonder at what was taking place. Peter had felt all these emotions, but his opponents only congealed with fear for their own exclusive privilege and were angered and irritated at his disturbance of their complacency.

It must be admitted that not all the rigidly orthodox are by intention obstructionists or destroyers of new revelations. Often their motive is high. Professor Kenneth Scott Latourette reminds us of one high-minded man who led a vicious persecution from an exalted motive, Marcus Aurelius, philosopher and Roman emperor. "It may have been that he saw in the Christians one of the threats to the culture which he loved and as a high-minded conservative to whom had been entrusted the preservation of an existing order and the prosperity of the realm, took action against them."³⁶ Yet the high intention did not lessen the bloody cruelty of the persecution.

Good people forget that, as Dean Inge says, "in theology there is only one way to be perfectly orthodox. That is not to think at all." Jesus' bitterest denunciation was reserved for professors. "Woe unto you, teachers," he cried (not a bad passage for professors to remember for their souls' good). He denounced those who laid down the orthodoxies to be followed, concerning themselves little for the lives which were to be lived by their rules.

It is always a tragic day when the church has more nerves than nerve, apprehensive jitters lest its settled order be changed, lest it be forced to think rather than repeat, when it has no courage to cross new frontiers of thought and action.

Dr. Dan B. Brummitt says, whimsically, after years of dodging automobiles, "If I'm bumped off an appropriate inscription over my remains would be, 'Died of looking the wrong way!'" That exact epitaph might be written over many a dead church. It has kept looking the wrong way — backwards to the petrified remains of yesteryear, instead of forward to new revelations of the God of the living.

There is always something unpredictable about a living faith, which makes rigid orthodoxy nervous. New ventures are a sign of life. What Professor Alfred North Whitehead says of a civilization is profoundly true of a church: "Without adventure civilization is in full decay. . . . The great achievements of the past were the adventures of the past. . . . Only the adventurous can understand the greatness of the past."³⁷

The only valid standard of orthodoxy is the spirit of Jesus at work in the world.

THE UNFORGIVABLE SIN — ACTION

Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised and didst eat with them.

ACTS 11:3

This is a little gem of narrative. It explains with perfect clearness what is the unforgivable sin against established orders and vested privilege — action. Words, no matter how bold and swelling, can be winked at. Action is unforgivable.

Peter is "on the carpet" before the leaders of the Judaistic faction in the Jerusalem church, for the crime of extending the blessings of the gospel to Gentiles. Inclusion of Gentiles in the Christian groups meant a violent breaking down of the walls of Jewish exclusiveness. It was a disturbingly new idea, one that held a real threat to the authority of the inner

group. Notice that these people did not object to Peter's preaching to the Gentiles. The unpardonable thing was his carrying into action the implication of the words he had proclaimed. "Thou didst *eat* with them." You not only talked but you did something to make the talk real.

This bit of history needs to be etched into our minds. It is the deed, not the word, which brings opposition to the Christian revolution in life. Of course, often the powers that be have no great love for Christian words. They will repress such words if it can be conveniently done, without too much uproar. But words are frequently harmless. Indeed they may serve as a safe outlet for discontent and protest. But deeds are a declaration of war, not to be ignored.

Among the humorous performances of nazi Germany — though it is tragic too — is the passage of Goebbels' decree abolishing dramatic and literary criticism. That eminent cultural authority ordains that "criticism shall be replaced by contemplation and description." But nazism is not the only system which thus seeks to shackle criticism. Often in a capitalistic democracy, economic power insists that the benevolent workings of the system be only raptly contemplated and piously described. No criticism by deeds of opposition. In a strike situation, for instance, the unforgivable sin, to employers and chambers of commerce, is action. Testimony before the Senate Civil Liberties Committee in July 1938 exposed the technique of the Republic Steel Company in dealing with those whose sympathy with strikers reached the stage of action — those who *did* something about it. "Thou didst *eat* with them."

Two truths emerge. First, it is *action* which counts in the carrying of the Christian evangel to our world. Action is what the world pays attention to. Words are so easy, so pleasant and satisfying that they are frequently subjected to a 99 per cent discount by the cynical pagan powers of our

world. In religion, as in criminal law, it is the overt act which is the crime. A recent novel defines a liberal as "a person who holds the right views but lacks the courage and single-mindedness to do anything about them." Cynical? Yes. But how often has it proved true of liberal Christians! In an old comedy of Thomas Shadwell's there is a knight, Sir Nicholas Gimcrack, who practices his swimming in dry security, outstretched frog-like on a table. "I hate the water," he confesses. "I content myself with the speculative part of swimming. I care not for the practick." We smile at Sir Nicholas' frankness, but how much swimming on land have we done? Resolutions, perorations, noble sentiments — but we "care not for the practick."

Yet Christianity must act if it is to find concrete leverage in the world. A woman recently went into a five and ten cent store and asked for compasses. "We have compasses for drawing circles, madam," the clerk said, "but not for going places." Christian truth has often been a compass for drawing circles, endless discussions that go round and round. But it is emphatically a compass for going places, for movement, for action, for definite arrival at definite goals.

A second truth is that action on Christian lines will always rouse opposition. We will do well to fortify ourselves by remembrance of that fact, lest we be driven into a blue funk of fear every time the inevitable opposition arises.

GRASPING TRUTH AT A DEEPER LEVEL

I remembered the word of the Lord. ACTS 11:16

Peter is not entirely accurate here. He did much more than merely remember the word of the Lord: he grasped it at a deeper level. It was remembrance plus — plus the reach and

range added to it by the new experience and situation. It was creative remembrance.

Creative remembrance is somewhat like a really great translation of a work of literature, a translation that is not a literal, word-for-word rendering which obscures the timeless significance of its original, but one that makes of it a new thing, a creative assertion of values felt in the present as well as in the past. In the finest translations the old Greek tragedies become recharged with meaning.

In any situation the most profound thing that can be done is to remember, to summon the authentic insight and wisdom of the past which does not change with passing years any more than does the law of gravitation. This is particularly to be kept in mind in a time like ours, when in many quarters the cardinal intellectual sin is judged to be remembering *anything*. In the mental cosmos of many of the twentieth century's bright children there is no room for ideas not strictly streamlined and chromium plated. One of these scornors of all yesterdays was recently ordering plans for a house from an architect. "I do not want," she explained swiftly, "any Corinthian or Ionic or Doric columns because they have already been used." A true child of her time — away with anything used before!

Yet to be adequate, remembrance must take on the quality of Peter's remembering of the word of the Lord. Here, for instance, is a word of the Lord: "Suffer the little children to come unto me." If those words are to mean more than a sentimentality, we must remember them at the deeper level of an understanding of all those forces in our economic life which frustrate the development of the child into a mature Christian personality. We must remember the words, "Give us this day our daily bread," at the level which sees all the processes of breadmaking and bread-sharing under the aspect of brotherhood. We must remember the words, "They that

take the sword shall perish with the sword," in the light of all those new economic and social interrelationships which make war more than ever before the ultimate futility.

We need more than mechanical repetition; we need the hard process of thinking which makes the ancient insight contemporaneous in its relevance. The history of the church's teaching on usury illustrates well the vanity of mere repetition. "Systems prepare their own ruin by a preliminary process of petrification; and if the continuity of religious teaching from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century is impressive, it is nonetheless evidence of the failure of thought to keep pace with the changing realities of economic organization. Traditional doctrines of prices and usury had endeavored to moralize economic conditions by treating them as a simple case of neighborly or unneighborly conduct; and they were repeated in a hundred pamphlets between 1600 and 1640. But in the conditions produced by the growth of international commerce, of capitalist industry and of an elaborate financial organization, the question which remained for solution was, who exactly is the neighbor in question? The teaching which had as its target the uncharitable covetousness of the village pawnbroker neither made, nor could be expected to make, any impression on the clothier, the East India merchant or the goldsmith banker. To be influential, it should have been recreated: in actual fact it was merely restated." ³⁸

In other words, real remembering requires the alert eye and the tough mind. As Dr. J. H. Oldham has recently reminded the churches, "if Marxism is shaking the world today, it is because of the long years of sustained intellectual effort which Karl Marx spent in wrestling with the fundamental problems of our economic life. If we are to meet the challenge of Marxism we must go deeper than he did."

THE CRIME OF LOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

*They held their peace and glorified God, saying,
Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life.*

ACTS 11:18

Here is something as new and fresh as today's five-star final edition of the newspaper. The Jewish Christians at Headquarters in Jerusalem agree with Peter in principle, that to the Gentiles God hath granted repentance unto life.

It was a handsome gesture. But if we follow the controversy a little farther, we see some of those same people who had glorified God because of his extension of grace to the Gentiles going back on their gesture. For Paul came along and, with incredibly bad taste, pushed this principle to its logical conclusion. He was taking Gentiles in droves into the church. "That's bad," cried his opponents. "Away with such a fellow!"

Dr. W. F. Blunt comments on this crime of Paul's: "We may say broadly that the Jewish Christians could agree, even if unwillingly, that an uncircumcised 'God-fearer' might join in Christian worship and life. . . . But their later antagonisms to Paul, when he pushed the inference attributed to them to its logical conclusion, show that they cannot have meant to throw the church open to Gentiles of all sorts, whether they had been previously attached to the synagogue or not."³⁹

We see this aversion to logical conclusions from an accepted principle at almost every turn today. It is one of the major problems in the extension of the kingdom of God. It is also a chief problem in the thinking and living of Christians themselves. It is all right to pass resolutions favoring industrial democracy or peace. But when one gets outside the glassed-in vacuum of rhetoric — when it appears, for in-

stance, that the industrial democracy which so gladly we hailed when it was a phrase rolling off an orator's tongue, will mean changes in the very structure of our society — there follows the automatic response, "Away with such a fellow!" We were merely "glorifying God" over a principle. What a shame to take the beautiful principle out of its case and muddy it up in concrete application!

As Hans Leitzman points out, the early persecutions were "against the extremists who thought of Christianity as free from persecutions."⁴⁰ In other words, against the single-minded folk who drew logical conclusions from their great truth. These are the people who are always persecuted. Those who have the good taste to draw the line this side of a practical conclusion have a pleasant time in this world and live lives unpunctuated by rocks. Van Wyck Brooks has described some of them (costume of 1830): "Harvard fostered polite, if not beautiful letters, it sent one back to Plutarch for one's modes, it sharpened the reasoning faculties, it settled one's grounds for accepting a Christian faith that always knew *where to draw the line.*"⁴¹

"Where to draw the line" — a lovely art, my masters! The comfortable classes of the England of the 1840's attained it. They felt "that Christian responsibility was a duty everywhere except in economic life, and that strengthened vigor, the control of nature by science and of events by prudence, are good things everywhere except in the hands of the state."⁴² Doesn't that last phrase fit the United States of 1939?

Against this shrinking from logic we must set the fact that, for an industrialized world such as ours has become, any "return to religion" must involve an application of Christian truth to the feeding, housing, education and employment of the people. We must get over the easy habit of regarding as a crime the extension of Christian truth into disputed areas.

When that noble soul, Bishop Paul Jones of the Episcopal Church, declared in 1917 when most of us were hysterically waving flags, "I believe that the methods of modern international war are quite incompatible with the Christian principles of reconciliation and brotherhood, and that it is the duty of a bishop of the church, from his study of the Word of God, to express himself on questions of righteousness, no matter what opinion may stand in the way," his fellow bishops were so scandalized that they deprived him of his office. But his is the only kind of logic that saves our religion from being an empty gesture.

Our plight is pictured with a rather terrible accuracy in the comments of Mr. Scott, the great liberal editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, on Lloyd George at the Paris peace conference in 1919: "Yes, Lloyd George is honestly for the League of Nations. But that won't prevent him from doing things at Paris which will be utterly inconsistent with the principle of such a league. It isn't intellectual dishonesty; but Lloyd George hasn't a logical mind. He doesn't understand the implications of his own position."⁴³ Of another British politician, Lord Palmerston, practically the same words are used: "He was too lazy to envisage the logical conclusions of his own premises."⁴⁴ That attitude seems to be characteristic of Christians as well as of politicians.

Nothing is more startling, when we come to think about it — as, alas, we rarely do — than the utterly tremendous affirmations we pronounce in any church service without the least attempt to picture the consequences of carrying them to their logical conclusions. Do we really believe in brotherhood if we are not prepared to accept the collectivist trend in the present economic world and to follow it as far as experience has demonstrated to be necessary to realize those human values which are highest in our faith?

INSPIRED AMATEURS

They therefore that were scattered abroad upon the tribulation that arose about Stephen, traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word.

ACTS 11:9

These words are a crack in a fence through which we can look at a great spectacle. Christianity was spread through the Roman world by amateurs, who took it along as a side line. Merchants, soldiers, craftsmen, traveled the seas and the roads as the unpaid, unprofessional carriers of the gospel. The spotlight which the Book of Acts focuses on the star performers, Peter and Paul, distorts the picture of what actually happened. It was through the rank and file, the amateurs, that Christianity spread so rapidly over the Mediterranean world.

That is well to remember in a day which relies so tremendously on paid professional leadership in the work of the church. It is no disparagement of trained leadership and its indispensable function to say that this early demonstration on the part of amateurs points the way to permanent success for the church.

The studies of recent years have added greatly to our knowledge of what has been accomplished by people from sheer love of a task. Kevin Quinagh has collected a surprising gallery of what he calls "inspired amateurs." Herschel was a musician who became one of the greatest of astronomers. Grote was a banker who became the historian of Greece. Priestley was a preacher who discovered oxygen. Schliemann was a merchant who excavated Troy. Spinoza was a grinder of lenses who took high place among the philosophers.⁴⁵

The most priceless gift that can come to a church is a

singlehearted spirit in the men and women who make up her ranks, their willingness to give to the work of the Kingdom all the strength and devotion they can spare from their vocation. In spite of all the professional skills at its disposal, the church is close to bankruptcy if there be lacking the sense of personal responsibility and devotion which was in those who were scattered abroad and traveled "speaking the word." Jane Addams powerfully experienced that essential sense of responsibility in connection with the cause of peace, a field in which she was an "amateur." "Looking back upon those efforts of hers, extending over almost forty years, one cannot but be reminded of that strange dream she had 'night after night,' when she was a little girl; that dream that she alone remained alive in a deserted world, and that upon her rested the sole responsibility of somehow making a wheel which should start again the world's affairs; the dream that she was standing in the same spot in the blacksmith's shop, 'darkly pondering as to how to begin,' and never knowing how. It was because in life as in her dreams she felt her responsibility as 'sole,' that she could never stop pondering or trying. She tried to make wheel after wheel to start the affairs of peace." ⁴⁶

THEY DIDN'T KNOW ANY BETTER

But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.

ACTS 11:20

The reason they "spake unto the Greeks also" was that they didn't know any better. Wherever the opportunity came along to preach the Lord Jesus to anyone at all, they had no

more sense than to go ahead and do it. They did not know the rules forbidding such scandalous evangelism. They did not consult the authorities. They knew only one authority — the grace of God to all men as it appeared in Jesus Christ. So they blundered into achievement.

The authorities at Jerusalem would never have made such a blunder. They had in the front of their minds the long bill of exceptions which had been attached to God's proclamation — the list of people, races, nations, to whom the evangel did not apply. But these naïve, unnamed believers were not equipped with such erudition. They had a better equipment, a bland and complete ignorance of what couldn't be done. So they did it.

From this bit of history, which is not without its touch of irony and humor, we can rise to what is almost a generalization of universal application. The great achievements of Christian history, and of history in general, for that matter, have been brought about by people who didn't know any better — by the "fools" who didn't know the rules or had forgotten them or didn't care about them. A little learning is a dangerous thing, when it is a little learning about the one hundred and one conclusive reasons why a thing can't be done. Charles A. Lindbergh, after his flight to Paris, returned to the United States on a ship which the government sent for him. After the eighth day at sea he sighed, "If I had known the ocean was so big I'd never have tried it."

Shailer Mathews has given an arresting definition of hell. "Repeatedly," he writes, "I have thought that hell might be pictured as an everlasting committee meeting on a good cause that could never be brought to pass."⁴⁷ That very thing has happened in many a Christian staff conference which brought nothing to pass because some of those present were equipped with such paralyzing knowledge of just

why it couldn't be done. That has been, in Kipling's words, "the perfectest hell of it." The native hue of resolution has been sicklied o'er by the scholarly knowledge of the extreme likelihood of failure.

Happily, these unnamed men from Cyprus and Cyrene have left spiritual descendants. The great missionaries stem from them in a direct line. Plenty of wise and learned people proved conclusively to Morrison, to Carey and Duff, that there was no use trying to take Christianity to China and India, to lesser breeds without the law. Plenty of bishops told John Wesley that it was against the rules and outside the realm of possible success to preach to the gin-sodden dregs of lower class Englishmen. But there were areas of divinely inspired ignorance in Wesley's well filled head. He didn't know any better than to go ahead and do it.

Here is a stirring story of one who didn't know the rules, that of William E. Gladstone and his work for the most neglected and despised people of all England, the prostitutes of London. "He would persuade these unfortunates, whom the 'unco guid' would not allow their skirts to touch, to come home to Mrs. Gladstone's house, where they would receive food and shelter and self-respect from him and her. He never denounced them. . . . He never demanded penance, penitence, or the working out of past sins in future misery. . . . His whole concern in each case was not with the past but with the future. . . . He would send these forlorn creatures to health resorts, paying for the whole obligation, and contriving, in conjunction with his wife, to procure them places of honest livelihood." ⁴⁸

Gladstone was greatly misunderstood. His political opponent made ready capital of his quixotic behavior. Of that his biographer John Morley, who is certainly not to be numbered among the Christian apostles, says a beautiful thing:

“ There was no worldly wisdom in it, we all know. But then what are people Christians for? ” What for indeed, if not to go beyond the bounds which caution sets?

The crippling to achievement, the “ settling down ” of the spirit induced by a wide knowledge of the history of impossibilities and failure, is well portrayed by a very tired liberal, Brand Whitlock: “ One changes as one grows older; one becomes a little more patient, perhaps a little wiser. And then, most of the reforms I used to advocate in my strenuous young days have been adopted. I don't know whether they have done any good or not, but they don't seem to have done very much harm. As to the new ones proposed, I am afraid that I am not quite advanced enough to favor them.”⁴⁹ This is the familiar rationalization which makes of a loss of faith — in his case a faith in democracy — a growth in wisdom.

In a Christian a well selected and carefully guarded ignorance — if it be an ignorance of small prejudices, of crippling *verboden*'s, of congealing hesitation — is a great asset. For without such ignorance we become, in a spiritual sense, what one polar explorer called the Eskimos, “ God's frozen children.” We read in the next verse of Acts, “ And the hand of the Lord was with them.” So it is, world without end.

A GOOD BEGINNING IN A BAD SPOT

The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

ACTS 11:26

And Antioch was as unpromising a spot as the world afforded for anything Christian to happen. It was a bad place, a black spot even on the Roman Empire. Nevertheless the name Christian originated there, in an environment more

formidable and discouraging than any in which we are set to preserve the name in its meaning and power. If in moments of defeatism we are tempted to say, "It is impossible to sustain a Christian enterprise here," there is this reminder — men did it once in Antioch.

Antioch was much like the cities in which we live and work. Rich, sophisticated, elegant, amusing, it was the third-largest city in a world which "prided itself upon its scientific conquests, its material achievements, its emancipation from tradition; a world which worshiped wealth and employed its scientific skill in the invention of new engines of war." ⁵⁰ Five miles away was Daphne, the seat of the cult of Apollo and Artemis. Yet here Paul founded the first missionary church. That fact should be heartening for disciples in the "tough" spots of New York, London, Chicago, Shanghai, Tokio and a thousand other cities.

Thomas Fuller, in the midst of the turmoil and disaster of the English revolution of the 1640's, wrote a tract with a quaint title, *Good Thoughts for Worse Times*. Surely here is a good thought for worse times today: the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.

What does it mean to deserve the name of Christian in today's strange world? Many things, these two among others. First, the spirit of Christ must so permeate all the recesses of our minds that our thoughts and actions evidence a peculiarly Christian quality. No half-way allegiance, which stops at the point where it begins to cost or to clash with the reigning codes, will suffice to win the name. We live in a world of sharp and strained tensions — tensions between humanism and the gospel of redemption, between nationalism and the universal family of God, between the economic order and Jesus' spiritual order based on love. These are no sham battles. We are not Christians if it is not obvious to all men which side we are on. Aldous Huxley recently paid

his respects to invertebrate tolerance as a weapon against great evils. "Our tolerance is the fruit of a certain weakness," he declared. "We are weak, because we have no certainties. . . . Recent history has shown that tolerant skepticism has little hope of standing up against a new faith. Fascism, nazism, communism, these are faiths comparable in intensity to the faith which possessed the whiskered Olympians [Victorians] of a century ago." ⁵¹

Second, we must be contrite, we must have the conviction that we share in social sin, the experience of repentance for communal transgression. A grand "old-fashioned" London preacher, Donald Soper, who has made the soap box his pulpit, as Paul made the market place his, has thus traced the experience as a result of which he felt he could be called Christian: "Christianity became a clear and unmistakable reality to me, when I faced its perplexities on a soap box years ago in Derby talking to a crowd of unemployed railway men. I am convinced that it will remain a speculation until we all say to ourselves, 'I am responsible for the Welsh miner and the Indian coolie and the Pentonville convict and the war in Spain. . . . The wrong done in the modern world and my share in it is intolerable to me and I must do something to avert its dreadful consequences.'" ⁵²

SIXTEEN TO ONE

And when he [Herod] had taken him [Peter] he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to guard him.

ACTS 12:4

This extract from the records of an ancient police court has more than a picturesque interest. It suggests a real reason for hope, and anyone who has an iota of hope nowadays has a responsibility for sharing it. Of course, anyone who is hope-

ful today will speedily get himself a reputation as a shallow thinker in many quarters, but some will gladly risk that danger.

When Herod put Peter into prison, he gave the job of keeping him there to four "quaternions" of soldiers. Anyone who has had even the mildest inoculation of high school Latin can work his way through that word to its meaning, four soldiers. Peter was given into the charge of sixteen men. Now that was certainly the ultimate compliment for the prisoner. Most of us would not mind being arrested if it took sixteen men to do the job. But it would be a rather questionable honor to be one of the sixteen.

But perhaps after all this may represent a real valuation; perhaps that one man, Peter, was equal to sixteen men. May it not be true that one deadly Christian is a match for sixteen ordinary men? We are all familiar with the words Tennyson put into the mouth of Galahad, "My strength is as the strength of ten, because my heart is pure." Not many of us would repeat those words today. They seem too priggish. More than that, we have become so familiar with the fact that our best intentions are strangely compounded of good and evil, that we shrink from declaring the unmixed purity of our motives. Words a bit older than that Victorian affirmation are more fitting for our lips: "God be merciful to me, a sinner." Yet cannot it truly be said of a Christian like Peter that his strength is as the strength of sixteen because he is in touch with a power beyond human origin and measure?

The new physics, which most of us can follow only from afar, assures us that the ultimate reality of our universe may be just a mathematical equation, a pointer reading. Perhaps the equation sixteen equals one can be taken as a sort of pointer reading of ultimate spiritual reality. We get a glimpse of the divine disdain of earthly arithmetic in the words of the Old Testament, "One shall put a thousand to flight," and in the words of the New Testament, "Where two or three are

gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them." The final mathematics of the universe runs this way: Under certain circumstances three equals four and any multiple of four.

Now that is absurd and ridiculous *unless* two possibilities are admitted.

The first is that we may be living in a world of spiritual forces. That idea is completely in line with the realities of a dynamic universe. If, as we are often assured, truthful representation is found in a painting rather than in a photograph, in three dimensions rather than in two, in the dynamics rather than in the statics of the world, then this pointer reading, sixteen to one, which allows for the action of the ultimate spiritual reality, God, is the finally reasonable one. The race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, nor is God to be found on the side of the heaviest artillery, as though he were a conscript gunner. "God," wrote James Russell Lowell, "is always 'I am,' never 'I was.'"

Again, there may be at the basis of the universe a moral reality with which man may put himself in harmony. Jesus had confidence in that moral quality of the universe. This is the way things are, he declared again and again. You can't change them. You can only adjust yourself to them and be saved, or deny them and be damned. A man in harmony with that moral purpose is like a man rowing a boat with the tide behind him and under him, pulling him along. God is in the boat, at the oars with him.

Such a faith in the moral nature of the universe is the only constant light in a dark world. It is a faith that against the sixteen of power and earthly strength, the one who stands for truth and right has the cosmic odds in his favor. That faith is touchingly expressed in verses commemorating the slaughter of the socialist workers in Vienna, February 12, 1934. That massacre was one of the first manifestations of the brute

power which today seems to have triumphed in Vienna. The sixteen seem overwhelmingly dominant. But the poet looks forward to God's harvest of tomorrow, confident that "the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself."

"Not your names do we know, Comrades Anonymous,
Nor your faces,
Nor on what last longing your eyes closed,
On what last anguish —
The wife widowed, the child orphaned.

The final dignity of grief at your graves
We could not offer,
Comrades Anonymous.
Workers' blood drenching the frozen soil
Is nameless blood.

But the earth turns.
The frozen soil melts at your hot rich blood.
Seeing in spring the blood-bronzed fertile fields,
We shall know our time for sowing.
You tilled, we sow, they shall harvest —
Comrades Anonymous." ⁵³

THE LANGUAGE OF ANGELS

*And behold an angel . . . awoke him saying, Rise
up quickly.* ACTS 12:7

The traditional tribute to beauty of speech is, "It was like an angel's." We assume — though we cannot verify the assumption — that an angel's words are always sweet and beautiful. It is worth while to gather together the slight data afforded by the Bible on the sort of speech angels used.

What did they say in their appearances recorded in the Bible?

Once we begin on that exploration, we pull up suddenly at the startling results. We discover that the words addressed by the angel to Peter in prison, "Rise up quickly," are typical of biblical angels. Nearly always they say the same thing — "Get up. Rise quickly." And those are not always the pleasantest words to the human ear. Sometimes they are unwelcome as the jangle of an alarm clock. The angel of the Lord said to Gideon, "Go in this thy might" (Judg. 6:12–14). An angel said to Elijah, "Arise and eat" (I Kings 19:5). In the nativity story, "an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, Arise" (Matt. 2:13). An angel of the Lord appeared to Philip saying, "Arise" (Acts 8:26). At the tomb of the risen Christ an angel says to the disciples, "Go quickly and tell his disciples."

Certainly "arise" is one of God's most frequent words to man. The words of Jesus to his three disciples in Gethsemane, "Rise, let us be going," are his eternal message to his church. They are words always in season, always needed to lift a disciple, or a church, out of lethargy, out of comfortable chairs and beds into a standing position ready for movement. There is much truth in the saying that we think differently when we are lying down and when we are standing up. When we arise and face a task our minds take on a new quality. That angelic speech is preliminary to all great action — "Get up. Face this. Get going."

Whenever preaching has this rousing, disturbing effect, it is literally the word of an angel. Such preaching was that of Samuel Barnett, for thirteen years canon of Bristol. He preached upon many subjects — strikes, trade unions, white slavery, socialism, class divisions. "We come to church to be comforted," was the complaint of one angry Christian, "whereas you seem to think it proper to make us uncomfortable." ⁵⁴ Barnett's was literally the voice of an angel saying, "Rise up quickly."

In *Pilgrim's Progress* there is a memorable description of an enchanted land where the soul was drugged into apathy and all distinctions were blurred. A church may very insidiously come to be such an enchanted land where the mind and soul grow languorous. In his description of mid-nineteenth century Vienna Phillip Guedalla says of the Viennese: "Largely untroubled by their imperial desires, a taste for music and a certain combination of cream with coffee appeared to serve them as an agreeable substitute for a public mind; and their parochial felicity was undisturbed."⁵⁵ Take three phrases out of that sentence — "music," "coffee and cream," "parochial felicity." Wouldn't they serve tolerably to sum up the major activities of some churches? What those churches need is the speech of angels — "Arise quickly."

Anything which says sternly to us, "Get up. Get going. Put all your faculties into action," is very probably the voice of an angel — a good angel. The inside story of the production of enduring literature is full of evidence that often the immediate impetus was not some beatific vision, but the staccato, alarm-like voice, "Rise up quickly. The flour barrel is empty." The situation, the difficulty, the task that imperiously orders us to our feet and impels us into motion is the speech of an angel.

LET'S KILL A FEW PEOPLE

*Herod . . . examined the guards and commanded
that they should be put to death.* ACTS 12:19

Herod had no idea what to do about Peter's escape from jail, so he decided that at least he could kill a few people.

That was extremely silly, but it is a technique that has from time immemorial been used by those in absolute power.

The universal remedy for almost any difficulty is to kill somebody, just as the panacea of seventeenth and eighteenth century physicians was to bleed the patient, no matter what his malady. It is a typical mentality, subhuman, but common. We apply it in international relations, in labor conflicts, in race antagonisms. Not having wit enough to think of anything else, we kill some people. At least, as in Herod's case, that is doing something.

The world needs a new technique.

THE PROPHETIC ELEMENT IN LITURGY

And as they ministered to the Lord. ACTS 13:2

The word here translated "ministered" has many varied meanings. Its use here of worshiping has a suggestiveness more than verbal. Its history shows that in the early days of Christian worship prophetic elements and what came to be strictly liturgical elements were mingled. Dr. F. J. Foakes-Jackson thus elucidates: "The word used for worshiping (*leitourgein*) is interesting. In Athens it signified the discharge of some costly public duty, such as equipping a ship or furnishing a theatrical exhibition for the public. In the Septuagint it is used of the duties of a priest serving in the sanctuary, and also of the discharge of the great religious duty of caring for the poor." ⁵⁶

Notice the intertwining of these two meanings of the word — "a priest serving" and "the great religious duty of caring for the poor." Here scholarship shows the close relation between liturgy and practical ministry to human need. And here scholarship is in season, for in contemporary life liturgy has been withdrawn so far from the field of prac-

tical need and from the prophetic element in religion that it seems to belong to another sphere.

Dr. George A. Barton, the eminent Episcopalian priest and scholar, is acutely aware of this chasm. Commenting on the liturgy of his own church, he writes: "It leads the worshiper to think too much of securing personal benefits for himself . . . and contains far too little that would lead the suppliant to accept at all costs the will of God as his will, and to consecrate himself to a Christlike life of service to others." ⁵⁷

Dr. Charles Clayton Morrison, in his *The Social Gospel and the Christian Cultus*, points out the fatal absence of the prophetic element in the traditional materials for Christian worship and deplors the fact that the social implications of the gospel have never been domesticated within the worship of the church. Liturgy and life have been too much separated. The result of this separation is sharply pictured in four lines of poetry by Tertius Vandyke, to which he gives the title "The Church of Buried Hope":

" Aloof from the woes of today though versed in the doctrines
of old,
She appears to be steadfast and wise and gravely at peace;
Careful of custom and law but lacking the faith to be bold,
She mouths apostolical words, yet gives no release." ⁵⁸

Liturgy and ministry to need, which began so close together that one word could include both — these that God hath joined together, let man cease to put asunder.

COURT CHAPLAIN OR PROPHET?

They found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul . . . the same called unto him Barnabas and Saul, and withstood them, seeking to turn aside the proconsul from the faith.

ACTS 13:6-8

Here is a dramatic meeting typical of many meetings in religious history, that of the court chaplain and the prophet. This Bar-Jesus was a religious performer of a conventional sort, attached to a political official as a kind of domestic chaplain. He greeted with easily understandable apprehension and opposition the advent of prophets who preached an ethical and spiritual religion. Such a message and such prophets threatened his position, his influence, his beloved perquisites. So he withstood Paul and Barnabas.

Court chaplains always do resist prophets. Their long conflict has been a major theme in Christianity. In this instance, the religious official was not a Christian but a degenerate Jew. But often the official who opposes the prophet bears the Christian name and holds office in the Christian church.

The name of chaplain is one to be held in honor. Military and naval chaplains, chaplains of institutions and legislatures, ministers of religion to official, specialized groups, have performed high and fruitful service. They have brought devotion, wisdom and courage to their task, frequently a very difficult one. But when we consider Bar-Jesus as a representative of the tribe of "court chaplains" something far different comes into view. The most vicious obstruction to the gospel is the official who makes Christianity subservient to an unchristian order of life, who prostitutes religion to the service of the power he puts into a higher place of authority,

be it a political state or an economic or social group, who sprinkles holy water on unholy things and sanctifies the unsanctified.

History is full of "false prophets" and "sorcerers" of this sort. It is hard to recall any war that has not been blessed by court chaplains. There is much bitter truth in the school-boy's definition of "minister of war" as "the clergyman who preaches to the soldiers in the barracks." The Christian preacher who stirs up blood lust by a perversion of his gospel is the supreme minister of war. He forgets that the historic role of the prophet is that of a man who does undiplomatic things to express the truth which has been given him. Dr. Guy Emery Shipler, prophet as well as editor, describes for us the true prophets — uncourtly fellows they were: "The prophets have always been queer, wearing camel's hair, eating locusts, going naked and barefoot three years, . . . wearing a yoke, throwing furniture down the church steps, preaching to the birds, carrying a banner of protest down Fifth Avenue." ⁵⁹

In our democratic country we have no royal court and no court chaplains. But their role is played by those who in the name of religion pronounce pious blessings on an unchristian *status quo*. They shrink from the uncomfortable business of challenging the assumptions of an unethical way of life; they shrink from tasks such as that which at one period of his life faced Charles James Fox and obliged him to become "a statesman calling for peace when the country was at war, and a reformer at a time when the revolution abroad had spread fear and suspicion at home." ⁶⁰

We can put religion into a place of ignominious subservience to things as they are not only by vigorous contention for present unchristian conditions, but also by indifference, by a placid serenity which will not allow itself to be ruffled by indignation and is anaesthetic to the pricks of conscience.

Too often we have matched merely routine competence against cataclysms in human affairs. The historian Parkman once complained that the scholarship of his time was "void of blood, bones, sinew, nerves and muscle."⁶¹ That does not leave much, physiologically. Parkman's description applies to a certain kind of preaching, that of the court chaplain.

The danger of degenerating into a court chaplain is always present for preachers. The prophet stands on a perilous hill-top from which there is an easy descent into the role of a functionary. The Englishman who wrote the *Torrington Diaries*, the Honorable John Byng, used a terribly suggestive phrase of the Duke of Marlborough's private chaplain when he called him "the subservient Dr. Tickle-text." There, but for the grace of God, go most of us preachers.

Dr. Tickle-text's way is easy. The way of the prophet is hard. But the South American poet, Roy Campbell, has described the prophet's rewards:

"There is no sea so wide, no waste so sterile
But hides a rapture for the sons of strife;
There shines upon the topmost peak of peril
A throne for spirits that abound in life;
There is no joy like theirs who fight alone,
Whom lust or gluttony has never tied,
Who in their purity have built a throne,
And in their solitude a tower of pride."

THE GOSPEL IS NOT "INSIDE STUFF"

Men of Israel and ye that fear God, hearken.

ACTS 13:16

The salutation with which Paul begins his speech here expresses his conception of the gospel as having a universal

destination. The growth of that conception in him can be clearly traced in the Book of Acts. Experience brought him a steadily widening understanding of the character of the gospel he preached. It was a message to the Jews and always remained that. But it was also a message addressed to a wider company, "ye that fear God." It was not merely "inside stuff" for an exclusive group. It was not a parochial announcement, but a universal proclamation.

Much Christian preaching has been too largely "inside stuff," addressed not to common men but to the members of a sort of esoteric cult, speaking a specialized language confined within the limits of an accepted tradition. Jesus spoke directly to broad human experience. That was one reason why the common people, those outside the strictly religious groups, heard him gladly. Again and again he made his appeal to the supreme court of human experience in the words, "How does it seem to you?" "Which of you that is a father" is a characteristic appeal.

Yet so often our presentation of the gospel is meaningless to those who have not already accepted the preacher's orthodox presuppositions. Hence it appears to lack the broad base of general human experience. It is an ivory tower floating in the air. It is inside stuff meant for insiders, irrelevant to others.

Paul got outside the inside. Ye who love God — he was talking to them, as well as to Jews. That appeal of our gospel to all men, on the basis of their nature and needs as men, must be preserved or, in many instances, recovered.

One great danger of the Barthian theology is right here. Its dogmatic reiteration of the complete "otherness" of God, its bland taking for granted the very things that a vast multitude in this generation hold to be up for discussion — the reasonableness of the Christian faith and its relation to human experience — may make the Christian gospel seem

just "inside stuff." One able theologian, H. F. Rall, puts this objection thus: "The crucial question then is: Just what is this Word of God, just where do we find it, and how can we know it? Barth is so afraid of humanism, so anxious to assert the transcendent and sole and absolute action of God, that he cannot give satisfactory answer to these questions. Man is not to judge the Word, only to accept it. On the human side, faith is just a 'vacuum,' an empty space, and when Barth sets forth the meaning of this Word, it becomes under his hand the traditional creeds, the Augustinian-Calvinistic system of theology in extreme form, with its absolute election and predestination, often too highly abstract and even speculative, with matters constantly settled in the old way by appeal to the letter of the Bible. His answer to the crucial question, when at last he gives it, is, 'I know because I know.'"⁶²

William James' feeling about religion, as described by Professor Perry, is to the point: "The religion which James respected was neither ecclesiastical nor dialectical but consisted either in the honest expression of human needs and aspiration or in the sense of power and insight associated with human faith and worship. The appeal of religion, like the appeal of science, is in the last resort an appeal to experience, and in so far as scientific and religious truths are both truths of experience they are consistent and homogeneous."⁶³

The reality of Christian experience is found in the way in which Jesus meets our nature. Christian experience is one form of religious experience and some of the evidence for its reality comes from the testimony of religious experience in general. That testimony is an amplification of Augustine's, "Thou hast formed us for Thyself." The eternal outreach of man tends to affirm that the capacity for meeting God is as much a part of man's nature as is his adaptation to anything in his environment — of his sight to objects, of his hearing

to sound, of his lungs to air. Up and down through all the nooks and corners of time and through all the spread of the earth, we meet varying forms of that one unending search. Religion persists in spite of all the solemn burial services held over it, because it meets this ineradicable need with which man started on his human journey and of which he becomes more conscious the farther he goes.

When esoteric "inside stuff" prevails in its message, the church becomes afflicted with the strange remoteness which marks so much communist propaganda. Cast in an alien jargon, filled with such phrases as "theoretical levels" and "rightist deviation," that propaganda is divorced from the realities of American working class life. The church may well be warned of the inevitable "revenge" which outsiders always take on those who talk a pedantic "inside" language. Professor Carl L. Becker thus warns historians of this peril: "Unless we [historians] adapt our knowledge to Mr. Everyman's necessities he will leave us to our devices, leave us, it may be, to cultivate a species of dry historical arrogance, growing out of the thin soil of antiquarian research."

The destination of our gospel is well expressed by G. Dawes Hicks in his statement that his message is addressed specifically to those who "have abandoned the resort of basing their trust on a miraculously attested revelation," who "find themselves unable to accept the creeds of Christendom as they are familiarly presented and who yet are persuaded that the spiritual life is a reality and that they largely owe their sense of its reality to the teachings of Christ and the Christian church."⁶⁴

That is a large and significant group to which the reasonableness of the Christian faith must be convincingly presented.

THE CURSE OF NOT SEEING GOD'S WORK

For I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, if one declare it unto you.

ACTS 13:41

This is the ultimate and terrible punishment of failure to respond to God's revelation and leading through history and experience, that one becomes unable to see or "in any way believe" in the works of God being accomplished under one's eyes. Paul's warning to his Jewish hearers, "Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you," ought still to echo ominously in our ears and consciences.

For habit easily breeds moral shortsightedness. Men who limit God to ways to which they have been accustomed develop a cataract in their spiritual eye. They cannot see the fresh revelation of God in their own day. Their punishment is not an arbitrary one. It is natural, psychologically and spiritually inevitable. If we keep our minds aloof from the surprises of an unpredictable God who fulfills himself in many ways, a God who has never shot his last bolt, the very habit creates an astigmatism which blurs our recognition of God's continuing grace.

In the world of mind and spirit, sharp eyesight is closely related to the state of the heart. "A loving heart," says Carlyle, "is the beginning of all knowledge. . . . Consider how the beginning of all thought worth the name is love, and the wise head never yet was without the generous heart." Dr. Howard W. Haggard points out how true this observation of Carlyle's has proved in medicine. Writing of Soranus, Paré and Oliver Wendell Holmes and their great work for child-bearing women, he says, "In the character of each there must have been much of the generous heart, which, though centuries apart, made them giants in the world."⁶⁵ They loved, and love helped their eyesight and their insight.

Again and again in the history of the church this solemn warning of Paul's, "Beware . . . lest God do a work which ye shall in no wise believe," has been ignored. God did a work in the missionary awakening of the early nineteenth century, a work which brought a new springtime of religious life. Yet thousands who were officially God's watchmen failed utterly to see that spring. Their eyes were holden by sleep induced by tradition and narrow habit. They were not on mental tiptoe, asking eagerly where God would appear next. God had become ancient history. In the days of John Wesley, the aging Bishop Butler sat on his episcopal throne and bewailed the irreligion of his time. Looking out through opaque cathedral windows, he could see no stirring of religion. Down at the foot of the hill, among the coal miners of England, a veritable summer of religious life was coming in. Yet the bishop could in no wise believe it.

This warning of the fate of those who are blind to the God of the living and his deeds among the living, has a sharp pertinence today. It is possible for us to look out on a world in which the old ways are being broken up, and miss entirely the spiritual significance of the times, because our eyes are blinded by habit and fear of change. We can come to think of God as limited by the precedents of a dead yesterday. This is particularly true of social changes which promise to bring deliverance to captives and healing to the bruised. An old civilization resting on might and privilege is using every desperate expedient to perpetuate itself against a new civilization that is struggling to be born. The church should realize that her real affinities are with the new and not with the old, and give bold and courageous leadership in the establishment of the new order. Such a role requires heart and eyesight.

To see the spiritual compulsion to a more humane order of life demands an increasing ability among laymen as well as ministers. There is much blindness among "leading laymen" to the religious aspects of social change. Dr. Joseph

Fort Newton has written, "If the prophet is an aviator, the layman belongs to the ground crew, trying to hold him near the earth, lest he lose himself in the sky and fail of leadership." ⁶⁸ Very true and very good. Yet very often the ground crew have the ship tied to the earth with stout ropes, determined that it shall not leave the ground. They are highly resolved that the church shall not get into the sky at all, but stay on the earth of the "solid sense" of "things as they are."

"Beware!"

AFTER CHURCH WAS OVER

Now when the synagogue broke up, many of the Jews and of the devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas; who, speaking to them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

ACTS 13:43

This conclusion to the Sabbath service does not follow the pattern so familiar to us. We know all too well the dismal anticlimax which often follows when "the synagogue breaks up." The congregation goes home to dinner, or there is a kindly, "That was a fine sermon, doctor," which forms a cheery requiem over an already buried truth. Perhaps, later on, the service comes to mind fleetingly in a lament that the soprano flats her high notes so often.

But there at Antioch of Pisidia we glimpse a more excellent way. Many of the worshipers followed Paul and Barnabas, eager for more. This was all the more remarkable because they had been given a forthright sermon, full of condemnation of the actions of Jews, full of controversial argument which collided with habitual ways of thinking, full of warning. They had received a stout crack on the head, and instead of feeling anger and resentment they inquired fur-

ther. They deserve the accolade of this generation, "They could take it." Our moderns can't take it. Nowadays irate hearers whose pet prejudices have been jostled cry out, "This man is dangerous. He ought to be silenced."

What ordinarily happens after a sermon? That question has a challenge to both preachers and hearers. Why does the word of God apparently have no permanent effect in the shaping of a new mind? The preacher must ask himself whether he can really expect any answer to his sermon. Is his truth sharp enough to demand a particular response? Or is he just talking in general — a thirty-minute discourse which, as one old lady said after listening to one of Emerson's speeches, "has no connection save in God." ⁶⁷

John Bennett has diagnosed a frequent cause of premature death among sermons: "Christianity is full of altars on which the death of Christ is celebrated daily and of pulpits from which the atoning death of Christ is preached every week, but from which has come no stimulus to change society." ⁶⁸ Let a preacher speak from conviction like that of the truly apostolic Niels Dahl of Denmark: "The great question for Christianity as it faces fascism and irreligion is whether there is a community of believers large enough and daring enough to mobilize the Christian religion before it is too late. This is no time for catechism or creed; it is time for a fight to a finish for the ideals in which you and I believe." ⁶⁹

The challenge comes to the hearer as well. It is hard even for a preacher whose words have as much "stimulus" and point as Paul's on this occasion, to get his message into a hermetically sealed mind. So often nothing happens after church because the hearer never becomes a worshiper. The two nouns are by no means interchangeable. The hearer sits in majestic aplomb and turns a face to the preacher. "All right. Go ahead. Entertain me." Such hearing frustrates even the grace of God.

GOD NEVER GETS IN A BLIND ALLEY

And Paul and Barnabas spake out boldly, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, . . . lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

ACTS 13:46

If the obvious and traditional instruments of God's purposes become unavailable, there are always others to be used. God never gets into a blind alley. He never comes to the end of his resources. He can and does find tools in the most unlikely places. "God can raise up out of these very stones children to Abraham."

This is one of the most important and sobering lessons of history. It ought to be an eternal warning to every privileged group, to every institution which considers itself an instrument of God's will. If the institution fails to do that will, God will throw it on the dunghill and go on with his work through other means.

Paul's momentous announcement, "Lo, we turn to the Gentiles," is a supreme illustration of this truth. An orthodox Jew could not even dimly imagine the possibility of God's carrying on without his chosen people, the Jews. Paul bluntly declares, "That is exactly what is happening. You are dependent on God. But God does not depend on you. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. We turn to the Gentiles."

The nativity stories are a beautiful parable of that same truth. New expressions of the spirit of Jesus have often found no room in the one place where they should have been born, in the church itself. So they have found their way into the world through unecclesiastical channels. The Reformation was such a new birth of Jesus, but it had to take place outside the church. When the evangelical revival broke

over Great Britain in the eighteenth century, there was no room for it in the parish church or cathedral. So this new incarnation of Christ entered the world in coal pits, in the fields, on street corners, under the open skies. Wesley and Whitfield and a thousand other minstrels of God wandered up and down the English hedgerows and highways and brought Christ to the world again. By a strange irony, it was a Methodist church which told William Booth that there was no room for such an expression of Christ as the Salvation Army.

The lesson for us is that we, who are so sure that we are indispensable to God's plans, may be discarded instruments. Professor John Macmurray warns us that today "religion stands at the crossroads. Throughout the world the parties of social progress are, in general, either passively or actively antireligious. Organized religion, on the defensive, tends to range itself, actively or passively, with the conservatives or reactionaries. But the tide of social evolution cannot forever be dammed by the dikes of vested interest. The progressive forces are bound to win; and it looks as though the bursting of the dikes would be quick and catastrophic. If in that hour religion is found still on the side of reaction, as it was in Russia, it must suffer almost total eclipse. Its existing forms will be doomed to destruction." ⁷⁰

We must make the church open its doors so wide that each new expression of Christ's spirit can enter in. New political experiments which honestly seek the more abundant life for men should find a sympathetic attitude in the church, however much they may violate traditions. New endeavors to bring the Christian spirit into industry, into business relations, into international contacts should find a cordial welcome, even though they outrage our economic prejudice and alter the course of the stream of profits.

One way of salvation is to escape from the habit of think-

ing in institutional terms. Religion necessarily gets a leverage on society through institutions. That is its means of influence. But the institutional habit of thought thus generated is a peril which tends to lead to identification of the institution with God. Thus, because the church in Spain has backed the rebels, multitudes of Roman Catholics and others have jumped to the conclusion that God is on the side of Franco. Because Russian communism rejects theism, multitudes of churchmen have decided that all socialism is antireligious.

If we are to avoid the pitfalls of this sort of institutional thinking, our religion must continually be translated from a passing dialect into a universal language.

NOT WORTHY OF TOMORROW

Ye judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life.

ACTS 13:46

To the Jews whom Paul addressed, the words here translated "eternal life" meant something very different from what they convey to us. Cadbury and Lake translate them "the life of the age to come." They say the words do not mean "eternal" life, which is a metaphysical concept entirely foreign to Acts, but that they refer to the Jewish belief in the "age to come" which was to be divinely established.⁷¹ Paul's meaning is that these Jews had, by their actions, judged themselves to be unworthy of the Great Future, the coming of which was part of their faith. Their conduct marked them as unfit for the tomorrow to which they looked forward.

That old Jewish conception of the "age to come" plays little or no part in Christian thinking today. But the idea of a divinely established tomorrow plays a great part. Every time we pray "Thy Kingdom come" we look forward, if we

have any vital faith, to a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. We pray for an end whose consummation requires divine action.

These words of Paul's, "unworthy of the age to come," give us something to ponder over. Are we worthy of God's tomorrow, of his Kingdom which is part of our Christian faith? Does our present conduct mark us as worthy of living in a God-ruled order of life? Suppose our prayers for the coming of a reign of love and brotherhood were answered. How would we like it? Are we fit to live in it? Are we preparing to live in it? The solemn truth seems to be that for many of us life in a realm of love and justice would be a very upsetting experience.

Many people are worthy of yesterday. They sincerely strive for yesterday's virtues, the individual rectitudes of a simple agricultural society. They act in ways suited to an age that has passed. But the virtues demanded by a mechanized, interdependent world — social-mindedness, the sense of communal guilt and responsibility, recognition of the right of the common man and of the supremacy of the common welfare — these they cannot compass, perhaps even make no attempt to attain. They insist on living in a yesterday.

Many actions and attitudes which were tolerable or even desirable yesterday are sins today. "Paternalism and patronage, honest attitudes in the first generation, instruments of exploitation in the second; child labor, regrettable, perhaps, though not wholly bad under parental control in simple rural life, but an atrocious robbery of body and soul in a factory system; individualism, the strength of a sturdy yeomanry, but a fatal weakness in an industrial laborer — these were agricultural and frontier survivals." ⁷²

In this sense, sin is essentially an anachronism. It is the carrying over of acts and attitudes which once were natural or at least negligible in their evil effects, into a different age

in which they become antisocial evils. Attitudes of selfish privilege are sin because they are not adapted to the Christian today or tomorrow. Here is one Christian's vision of some factors in a Christian America to come — "collective in its economic basis, democratic in its political control, individualist in the unfettered achievement of its creative workers." ⁷³ Do our present actions judge us to be worthy of that?

In that deep and beautiful story of Italy under the heel of fascism, *Bread and Wine*, there is one episode where a woman innkeeper, a devout Catholic, thinking from his kindly actions that a certain guest might be Jesus returned to earth, is at a loss what to do in this situation. So she hurriedly consults the government's list of rules for keeping an inn. She is greatly disappointed to find no directions covering a possible arrival of Jesus.⁷⁴ We may smile at that. But here is something not to be smiled at: Does our way of life leave any room for a possible arrival of Jesus in our world, the near world of our personal contacts or the farther world of our environment? Or do we desire that God's Kingdom come only provided it doesn't upset anything to which we have become accustomed?

This question comes to the church as well as to the individual Christian. Is it worthy of the tomorrow — God's tomorrow — of its gospel and prayers? Do its thinking and its effort make for that revolution in our world which must come if an age of brotherhood and love is to supplant an age of exploitation and war? Or does it turn away from the burning question of a more Christian social order with the excuse that it must "keep out of politics"? Dealing with this excuse, which so often is the plea of cowardice and inertia, the Anglican Bishop of Winchester paints an accusing picture. "There can be no doubt that the alienation and even hostility of large sections of the working classes from the church during the past century was partly due to its failure to protest against the cruelties and injustices inflicted during

the Industrial Revolution in factory and mine on the weakest members of the nation. Today we wonder how the church then could have made no protest through its official leaders against the enclosure of the commons and the long hours worked by young children in the darkness of the mines. Tomorrow our descendants may feel equal surprise at the way in which Christians of our generation acquiesce so easily in the glaring contrast between the rich and the poor and in the persistence of bad housing. If Christianity is indeed to cover the whole of life and has a message for man's complete personality, it is far better for the church to risk making occasional blunders in the attempt to abolish some social evil rather than to incur certain condemnation for its absorption in its own affairs and controversies." 75

We call our Master the Prince of Peace. In regard to peace, do we, with Omar Khayyam, fatalistically "resign tomorrow's tangles to the wind"? Or are we worthy? Do our present efforts for securing peace and our willingness to pay the price real peace will cost, judge us worthy of the age of peace to come?

MAKING DUPES OF THE WOMEN

But the Jews urged on the devout women of honorable estate . . . and stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and cast them out of the borders.

ACTS 13:50

Here is the first mention in Christian history of the use of deluded women as a force opposed to the gospel. A vested interest employed them as tools against Christian truth.

Such manipulation of women for manufacturing hysteria has gone on all through the centuries. Some of the most flagrant chapters of that story are being written at the present

time. The Jews who desired to drive Paul and Barnabas and the Christian movement out of Antioch knew that the job could best be done in a heated atmosphere. Shrewd propagandists seized on a group of women of good reputation (and very probably the words "of honorable estate" mean also of good economic and social position), proselytes from among the Gentiles, as the most likely company to be easily stampeded by emotional appeals to prejudice.

It is a technique painfully familiar. Appeals to women to head the hue and cry against change in the *status quo*, to oppose fresh ways of thinking which would bring the Christian gospel into vital relation to our society, are usually phrased with fulsome flattery. But they are always the ultimate insult to womanhood, for they are based on contempt of women's mentality, and assign them the role of weak-witted, sentimental dupes.

Today the forces that foster war are the most conspicuous manipulators of women. Women have a measureless stake in peace. Yet the emotional attack on them has made dupes of multitudes of women, to the extent that their energies have been aroused against forces for peace. Many have proved easy victims of hysterical patriotism. They have not noticed the strings of propaganda that are being pulled behind the scenes.

Such propaganda has been notably successful among certain sections of the Daughters of the American Revolution and other organizations, which have been provided with weird charts purporting to show that many of the most distinguished citizens of the United States are dangerous communists. A conservative historian, James Truslow Adams, thus salutes the D.A.R.: "Considering the extreme die-hard conservatism of the resolutions of the Daughters of the American Revolution, today, it seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that very few of them would have been Mothers of the Revolution in

1776, when revolution meant riding the whirlwind of social revolution.”⁷⁶

Dr. Walter Russell Bowie has said plain words about this sort of deluded patriotism. “One hundred and sixty years ago men revolted against what they considered to be the oppression of human personalities and the denial of human rights, and now in the perspective of one hundred and sixty years they have become heroes and national saints. But today if men agitate against existing grievances . . . then those persons are looked at by the frightened conservatives as dangerous. A revolutionary name that sounds very well applied to your ancestors becomes a term of horror when you fasten it on your neighbors. We need a good many graces in American life today, but one we need most is the grace to laugh at some of our pompous contradictions. And one of these is that estimable but unhumorous fellowship who are the daughters of yesterday’s revolution, but are in danger of being the sisters of today’s Tories and the mothers of tomorrow’s reactionaries.”

But women are exploited to obscure other issues also. In strike situations, it is customary for the employers to create a “women’s auxiliary” among “women of honorable estate,” and to use it as a tool in arousing passion and prejudice against labor. Thoughtless surrender to prejudice puts many a woman squarely against the progress of the Christian evangel in a world which desperately needs it.

One of the most hopeful signs in our world today is the mounting evidence that increasing numbers of women refuse any longer to be dupes. They are aware that their Creator has endowed them with minds, which they insist on using. They are no longer satisfied with the ignominious role so placidly and gratefully accepted by Galsworthy’s nineteenth century heroine who says sweetly: “I don’t know what I should do if I had to form opinions for myself. I wasn’t

brought up to it. I've always had them nice and second-hand." 77 Women nowadays need first-hand opinions of their own.

A STRANGE PRESCRIPTION FOR JOY

And the disciples were filled with joy. ACTS 13:52

This verse is the happy ending of a somewhat painful chapter of Acts. What had happened that caused the disciples to be "filled with joy"? Things that seem rather unpleasant — a fight with a mob, expulsion from the city, the breaking up of their plans, the heaping of scorn and denunciation on them. And so, we read in that unreasonable logic so often met with in the New Testament, "the disciples were filled with joy." Yet that sequence is by no means fantastic. Those are, indeed, reasons for joy — the deep joy that follows upon struggle for a cause, on self-sacrifice for it.

A striking contemporary parallel to a score of situations in the Book of Acts is found in one of Martin Niemöller's letters from a nazi prison. "I am firmly convinced," he writes, "that all attempts to place obstacles in the way of the holy gospel must serve the sole purpose of increasing its impelling force. I see this so clearly in my own case as a result of these seven months [of imprisonment]. I should like to say to everyone: Be of good cheer. Our Lord God is going forward and despite the apparent defeats of his church, he is confounding his enemies."

In another letter he observes, "I believe my incarceration is an instance of God's holy sense of humor. Here they laugh scornfully, 'at last we have got him,' and arrest eight hundred more, but what is the result? Full churches with praying congregations. It would be utter ingratitude to become bitter in the face of such facts."

Here a modern disciple taps two great sources of joy — faith and struggle.

One of the greatest blindnesses of our day is that which confuses joy with something that has very little to do with it — comfortableness. When we insist so frantically on the lower good, comfort, we miss the higher one, joy. There is not a line in the thirteenth chapter of Acts to indicate that the disciples were comfortable at Antioch of Pisidia during these hectic days. But joy breaks through all the record. Baron von Hügel expressed a true insight when he wrote: “Religion has never made me happy; it’s no use shutting your eyes to the fact that the deeper you go, the more alone you will find yourself. Religion has never made me comfortable. I have been in the deserts ten years. All deepened life is deepened suffering, deepened dreariness, deepened joy. . . . Do not be greedy of consolation. I never got anything that way.”⁷⁸

REAL NEWS SPREADS

*And the word of the Lord spread abroad throughout
all the region.*

ACTS 13:49

No wonder. Something had happened. Paul and Barnabas had taken a revolutionary step in throwing open the doors of the Christian church to the Gentiles. From the sober viewpoint of history this was one of the most important actions ever taken. And the news spread because there was something to spread.

We are familiar with the continual complaint of church people that newspapers do not give sufficient space to news of religion. The complaint is in some degree justified. But may it not be that one reason the newspapers do not give more space is that there is too little real *news* from the field of

the churches? This news from Antioch spread not because services were held "as usual" at eleven A.M. and eight P.M.; it spread because something that was most obviously news had taken place. Paul's sermon was so concrete and forthright that it upset a city. The result was a definite action. No wonder the news spread.

There is much for us to ponder in the comment of a veteran newspaper man, Damon Runyan, that so little seems to be said in the churches which gives the impression that something momentous is afoot. In a column in the tabloid *New York Daily Mirror* he wrote of his favorite Monday morning diversion — "reading in public prints the extracts from the sermons delivered in New York churches on Sunday." His ever recurring hope that "some preacher will have something interesting or exciting to say" is generally disappointed, he says. And he remarks, "If the houses of worship in the big town are not drawing the customers as they should, it is not because religion is at a low ebb, it is because the preachers are too dull. Our greatest need in the New York pulpit is a few preachers who will haul off and slap the ears off evil in words that the lads around Lindy's will savvy, in the remote event they read them."

There is an acid tinge to another newspaper man's comment on the church: "When a respectable middle class preacher goes Christian — that's news." His sarcasm strikes home. Perhaps if there were more of this "going Christian" in the face of an apprehensive privileged order, religion would have more news value. But alas, the pulpit is often merely a place in which preachers indulge in the empty exercise described by the editor of the *Manchester Guardian* as "holding Roman principles in graceful attitudes."

Are we making any news that can't help spreading? Are we doing anything which will create the conviction that the Christian gospel can revolutionize a pagan world? Do we

bring our truth into such bristling and close contact with to-day's need that it will overcome the familiar reproach of multitudes that the church of Christ is irrelevant almost to the point of futility?

These questions are the order of the day.

DISTURBING THE PEACE OF THE SYNAGOGUE

*They entered together into the synagogue of the
Jews.* ACTS 14:1

And before they had finished they had badly disturbed the peace of the meeting! Drop down to verse 4 — “the multitude was divided,” and to verse 5 — “there was made an onset both of the Gentiles and Jews.” That was a nice ending for a morning service — an “onset”!

This passage gives a glimpse of a technique of evangelization which is well worth examining. When the apostles came to a new city they went first to the synagogue. That was perfectly natural, for there the most likely converts were to be found. They saved time and effort by making a start there. It is no wonder that the Jews opposed to the new sect got thoroughly mad over the technique.

But the apostles were always doing more than “going through the service.” That was merely a beginning. From there they always went on to preach the culmination and conclusion of the Jewish faith in Jesus, which, in their view, gave Judaism its real meaning. But of course that was what disturbed the peace of the synagogue.

Today the growth of a vital Christianity depends on the persistent employment of the same technique. We begin in the same place — in the synagogue, the church. But it is not enough merely to “go through the service” — though,

often, that is about all that happens. The evangelistic duty and opportunity is to push on to the culmination and conclusion, to bring an ancient revelation up to date, to make clear the meaning of Christ for our day. That course, to be sure, is always likely to bring trouble. It did back there in Iconium, in Paul's day. It will have the same effect in any city today. But such creative disturbance of the peace of a congregation is essential to an ongoing church.

How pale and soporific many of our proclamations appear in the light of the onset which followed Paul's proclamation of truth in the synagogue! Christopher Morley writes in one of his *Translations from the Chinese*:

“ In books, as in life,
An excess of sugar
Does not promote
Longevity.” ⁷⁹

Neither does an excess of sugar in the interpretation of Christianity to the world promote longevity for its influence. We have so much sugared Christianity. Of course, there is no salvation in a head-on collision; no saving grace in loud voices or defiant gestures, or any other form of bad manners. But in the Bible a proclamation of the way of salvation frequently begins with the word “awake.”

There is saving grace in a message that disturbs. Any new creation, in nature or in art, involves disturbance. No disturbance, no new life. Physical birth is a deep and dangerous disturbance. And let us remember that for every destructive and dangerous disturber there have been fifty fruitful and effectual ones. Jesus was the greatest disturber of history; he set a son against his father, a daughter against her mother.

A good test of our teaching and living is, Does it disturb anyone or anything? Not superficially but deeply. We are too intent on cheerful messages. When a man is dangerously

sick, he needs not a cheering message but a saving one. And the saving message may be both mentally and physically disturbing — an operation. Dallas Lore Sharp gave utterance to a common fallacy in his advice to writers, "The world is sad enough. If you cannot say something to help or cheer it on its way, keep still." That advice makes an utterly false identification of help and cheer. The thing that may ultimately help may be, and often is, not immediately cheering at all.

The disturbance that saves a too quiescent and complacent world is sharply concrete. What is vague lacks upsetting force. Albert Edward Wiggam has pointed out what is the greatest futility of much preaching in his words: "When a public speaker has no clear view of the solution of his own problem he always winds up by recommending the spirit of Christ. It never fails to bring salvos of applause. The people walk out with a rapture of new exhilaration believing that they have actually got someone out of trouble."⁸⁰

In sharp contrast to this is the remark of Albert Einstein. When someone asked him how he discovered the theory of relativity he answered, "I challenged an axiom." Thus it is that new revelations and discoveries, a new society, are brought about. Our calling is to challenge in the name of Christ the axioms of an unchristian society.

WHEN THE SPLIT COMES

But the multitude of the city was divided; and part held with the Jews and part held with the disciples.

ACTS 14:4

Paul and Barnabas did not begin their work at Antioch of Pisidia with a split. For some time they were allowed to

speak freely. The crowd rejoiced to hear them. But presently it became evident that their message was more than a traditional homily embroidered on the fabric of Judaism. It was a new weave. It meant something different. It called for a decision. When that clear meaning emerged, a split came. Some received the message, others rejected it.

There is a quality of inevitableness about such a split. Complete unity in a large crowd is ordinarily to be obtained only around a minimum of faith and program. Paul could have continued to have a Church of the Least Common Denominator, held together around those generalities which everyone could accept without cost or definite decision. He could have avoided a split by slurring the definite and peculiarly Christian elements in his message. But he was not satisfied with such a denatured "united front." He was preaching the gospel of Jesus and the resurrection, and when the split came he accepted it as evidence that the truth had begun to work.

Christianity has not done its redeeming work in the world through Churches of the Least Common Denominator. The darkest hours of the church have been those when it has sacrificed its positive message on the altar of inclusiveness. This early split warns against the deceptive unity won by slurring over the definite and divisive Christian elements of faith and purpose. Of course, there is need for unity among Christian forces. But unity around an easy minimum is never a prelude to victory; it is invitation to defeat. The need is for an uncompromising unity with the Christian revelation and with the human family and its need. There is a church in London which bears the quaint name "All-Hallows-on-the-Wall." A church which seeks unity by compromise might well bear the inglorious name "All-Hallows-on-the-Fence."

Emerson writes in one place, "When a man lives with God, his voice shall be as sweet as the murmur of the brook

and the rustle of the corn." Beautiful! But is it true? Was Jesus' voice as sweet as the murmur of the brook when he said, "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees"? Was it as sweet as the rustle of the corn when he commanded, "Take up your cross and follow me"? Was Paul's voice sweet to all his audience when in this address he quoted from Habakkuk, and added, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish"? Is the voice of the present-day saint and prophet, Vida Scudder, sweet to all when she says, "What we owe to the poor is not charity, but expiation"?⁸¹ Emerson is inconsistent with his statement about the voice of the man who lives with God when he says, far more truly, "Your goodness must have some edge to it, else it is none."

The split comes not only on matters of theology, but even more sharply on the economic and social implications of the Christian revelation. That truth can be put so ambiguously that it falls flat. A story, entirely apocryphal, is told of Henry James' sending to Elizabeth Jordan a proposal of marriage couched in so involved a style that she could not understand it; she answered in a note so illegible that he could not read it.⁸² That carnival of incomprehensibility is not an inapt symbol of preaching that never splits anything.

BLUNTING NEW TRUTH

And they called Barnabas Jupiter, and Paul Mercury.

ACTS 14:12

The crowd at Lystra blunted the edge of new truth by putting it into old categories. Thus it became merely a part of "the same old thing again," when actually it was not the same old thing at all, but something significantly new. They gave to these new personalities with a new message the names of

their old familiar gods. So they not only missed the new truth entirely but, what is more important, prevented it from making any change in their familiar ways.

It is a trick men of every century have done to perfection. Again and again, the revolutionary Christian gospel of love has been forcibly pressed into pagan molds which distorted it out of all recognition. Christian monotheism has become the old polytheism. The Prince of Peace has appeared among men, and multitudes have hailed him as Mars, the god of war. And the gospel of peace has been interpreted as a call to the sword. John Drinkwater, in an address at Columbia University, pointed this out in bitter words: "Even in our lifetime, the church has failed mankind in crises both of war and of peace. The church in 1914 ought to have refused flatly to lend support to the madness that was driving the world to defy every tenet of Christianity, and instead the church joined enthusiastically in the row — to its lasting disgrace. Even the people who accept the theology of the church have been saddened by this failure. Those of us who do not accept it are not saddened but a little curious to know what will happen to a body that, by its ethical failure, must also weaken the doctrinal authority that we have always disputed."

It has been called the mark of skillful administration to call a new thing by an old name to which the people are devoted. However that may be of administration, it is really skillful distortion of great truth. It is just the reverse of what Jesus did. He took old conceptions like the "kingdom of God" and put fresh meaning into them.

In truly noble words Jan Christian Smuts has protested against the blunting of Christian truth which the treaty-makers at Versailles brought about at the conclusion of the World War by pressing that truth into the outworn categories of hate, revenge, and greed. "The spirit of the new life," he said, "the victory of the great human ideals for which the

people have shed their blood and their treasure without stint, the fulfillment of their aspirations towards a new international order and a fairer, better world, are not written in this treaty, and will not be written in treaties. 'Not in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, but in spirit and in truth,' as the great Master said, must the foundations of the new order be laid. A new heart must be given, not only to our enemies, but also to us — a contrite spirit for the woes which have overwhelmed the world: a spirit of pity, mercy and forgiveness for the sins and wrongs which we have suffered. A new spirit of generosity and humanity, born in the hearts of the people in this great hour of common suffering and sorrow, can alone heal the wounds which have been inflicted on the body of Christendom."⁸³

The men who shaped the treaty of Versailles called Jesus Mars. Other men, when they ignore the gospel of justice and exploit their fellows, seem to think that Jesus is nothing different from Mercury, the pagan god of theft. In numberless ways the Christian truth is distorted. He in whom there is neither bond nor free, Scythian nor barbarian, has been called upon to condone pagan exclusiveness and racial contempt.

Against such blunting of the revelation which makes all things new, there is no remedy except to "turn from these vain things to a living God."

A PREACHER'S GREATEST TEMPTATION

But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they rent their garments and sprang forth among the multitude . . . and with these sayings scarce restrained they the multitudes from doing sacrifice unto them.

ACTS 14:14-18

There is in these words impressive evidence of the integrity of Paul and Barnabas. In swift and decisive fashion they vanquish the greatest temptation which ever comes to a preacher or other public representative of a cause — the temptation to allow attention to be centered upon him rather than upon his message and its demands. Paul and Barnabas were receiving a tumultuous welcome at Lystra. But it was a personal welcome, based on a misapprehension. They desired no merely personal triumph, no crowning with garlands as gods, while their message was ignored. With strong and certain hands they turned the spotlight away from themselves and centered it on their message. That, in a public performer, is the last full measure of devotion.

This shifting of attention is not so simple a matter as it might at first seem. A large part of a messenger's effectiveness, be he preacher, teacher or other representative, comes from his personal qualities. To delete entirely the play of those personal gifts and characteristics is to impoverish and enfeeble the message. The man must, in a very real and high sense, have the center of the stage. This is recognized in that most quoted of all definitions of preaching as being "truth through personality." If Phillips Brooks, whose words those are, had been eliminated as a person, how much feebler his sermons would have seemed.

Shelley wrote,

“ Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity.”

The words describe the true mystery of preaching. Truth comes stained with the colors of life. The word “stained” so often has a bad connotation, as when we speak of a man whose record is “stained.” Too readily we forget the high and beautiful meaning of the word. The cathedral window is stained, and its glass stains the white radiance of the sun into deep and rich beauty. The autumn trees are stained into unforgettable wonder. The truth of Christ was stained by all that Phillips Brooks was, by what Francis of Assisi was, by the full-tinted coloring of a John Bunyan or an Elizabeth Fry.

Yet, from that very truth, there stems also the danger of centering attention on the personality to the dimming of the truth. The subjective element overmasters the objective interest in the outside reality. History and biography are strewn with instances of that peril. Carlyle said of popular lecturing that it is “a mixture of prophecy and play-acting.” Men of the pulpit know that strange, intoxicating, seductive mixture, dangerous to personal integrity and to undivided allegiance to a Master and a cause. We all know the saying that Edward Gibbon came in time to mistake himself for the Roman Empire. A. B. Walkley, the London dramatic critic, put it candidly: “Few plays interest me, but I am always very much interested in what I am going to say about them.”⁸⁴ Many a Christian, preacher or layman, might well ponder that confession.

Lowell Thomas writes: “In every dangerous occupation, where men face death each day as they pull on their working clothes, there is some one enemy they most fear. Every man who has a hazardous job has an enemy against which there is

no sure defense. With the lads who erect the skeletons of skyscrapers it is the wind. With deep-sea divers it is the pressure of the water. With the sandhogs it is the ever present threat of a 'blow.' With the men who go down into the dark catacombs of the coal mines it's not the fear of a cave-in; the enemy they fear most of all is the dreaded, deadly 'after-damp' that follows a gas explosion."⁸⁵

The business of being a Christian is a hazardous occupation. True, the preacher or other representative of the Christian evangel does not face physical hazards. He faces the danger which Paul and Barnabas met — that of obscuring the truth by his own person.

This bit of history from Acts portrays another ever lurking danger — the breaking down of integrity by the poison gas of praise. Praise is a habit-forming drug. A story about Mussolini — probably a bit of popular folklore — goes that the duce once asked a French chemical expert what was the most dangerous and overpowering gas. With his eye on the "sawdust Caesar," the expert answered, "Incense." He spoke expertly.

There is no escape from this temptation except that which the disciples took. They were quickly sensitive to its presence, as the seasoned woodsman is instantly aware of the warning noise of a rattlesnake. Paul escaped the peril by a prior commitment to his Master: "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me. . . . That in all things he may have the preeminence."

" My life restores its borrowed ray,
That in Thy sunshine's blaze its day
May richer, fuller be."

WHAT DO YOU SELECT FROM EXPERIENCE?

They rehearsed all the things that God had done with them, and that he had opened a door of faith unto the Gentiles.

ACTS 14:27

The most important thing in life is not the kind of experiences we have but what we select from them for keeping. The disciples made a selection out of their total experiences on the trip which is described in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Acts. This report might have been vastly different and still completely true. They might have chosen to remember their mishaps — a record hard to match. They might have dwelt lovingly on every hair-raising detail. “Oh, it was terrible! We were beaten. We were stoned. We were driven out of town. We had the most barbarous treatment.” But they “rehearsed the things God had done with them.” They made an anthology of their own, a “Golden Treasury” of great positive providences, beside which any misfortunes were incidental. They made an apostolic selection. Here was the big thing — through them God opened a door to the Gentiles.

Do we dare test ourselves by this report of theirs? What do *we* select out of our varied experiences? Do we rehearse an epic of calamities, or “what God hath done with us”? When our interest is centered on our comfort or our prestige, whatever adversely affects them becomes the abiding memory which erases everything else. It is reported that when one of the editors of Scribner’s publishing house cut out some fifty thousand words from Thomas Wolfe’s lengthy novel, *Of Time and the River*, Mr. Wolfe was aghast. “This,” he shouted, banging his fist on the table, “is the greatest crime since Judas betrayed Christ!” So the tale of your private woes can grow.

In contrast to epics of sore toes and barked shins, place the exalted conception of life expressed in the words, "what God had done with them." The disciples were not little ganglia of complaints; lifted up in God's hands, they became instruments of God's purpose. That is the life which is life indeed.

An observation of Ernest Dimnet's goes to the center of this matter. Dimnet became almost perfectly bilingual. He has written ten times as much in English as in French. It is actually easier for him to address an audience in his adopted language than in his native tongue. Does he think and dream English? The questions, he replies, are meaningless; we think and dream in pictures rather than in words; the real question is in what language one takes notes.⁸⁶

In what language do you take notes as you look at life? In the language of comfort or gain, or in the language of what God hath done?

THE OPEN DOOR OF FAITH

That God had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

ACTS 14:27

The beautiful symbol of an open door, so often used in the New Testament, has become so familiar that its tremendous meaning is easily obscured. There is continual need to sweep away the webs which have been spun over it.

Here a central revelation of Jesus has been clearly grasped and stated: the open door into the fellowship of God is faith, not ceremonial or rite. The Gentiles did not enter the Christian fellowship by the narrow passageway of circumcision or a dietary code, but by faith. Christ was the door.

But that open door had been slammed shut. In its place had been put the guarded and blocked entrances of ceremony, of race, of nationality, of orthodoxy. We are all familiar with

modern forms of these old Jewish barriers. It is not much of an exaggeration to say that the substitution of other tests for the one great test of faith in Jesus Christ has gone on throughout the history of Christianity. Orthodoxy of opinion, the fanciful lineage of apostolic succession, the use of sacraments as bars of exclusion — all these have closed the open door of faith.

Always the old cry is in order: "Open the gates of the temple!" Set again in its central place in the spiritual edifice of Christianity this door that God opened to outsiders. In a tribute to the stagecraft of Henry Miller, his biographer wrote, "He vastly raised the standards of production in our theater less by attention to externals than to a true and beautiful rendering of the play's essential meaning."⁸⁷ There is a pearl for the church to hang on its chain of memory — "a true and beautiful rendering of the play's essential meaning." Yet what perverted attention has been given to externals which distort that essential meaning.

During the summer of 1936 an American visitor sat in St. Paul's Cathedral in London during a morning service, directly opposite the reproduction of Holman Hunt's painting, "Christ at the Door." The preacher of the morning was a minor canon (on the basis of his sermon that day he seemed a very minor canon) who gave an exposition of the most rigid tenets of strict Anglo-catholic doctrine — an orthodoxy test which read a large part of his audience entirely out of the church. And while that ceremonial purge was going on from the pulpit, the worshiper was staring directly into Hunt's noble picturing of the words, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. . . . If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

Principal Wallace of Queen's University, Canada, has expressed his conception of the permanent meaning of the door

of faith: "The essential Christian belief is a sense of the quality of life as shown us by Christ, and a sense of the fatherhood of God as shown by Christ in his own life."

THE HEADQUARTERS MIND

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, saying, Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

ACTS 15:1

This conflict between the strict Jewish party at Jerusalem and in Judea and the more liberal and adventurous church at Antioch illustrates the eternal tension between the crowd at headquarters and the people in the field. There is a certain type of mentality, fairly consistent in all fields of action and in all professions, which may be represented by the initials used in armies, "G. H. Q." — General Headquarters.

There were, of course, many more things which entered into this conflict. There was the inevitable struggle between rigid traditionalists and experimentalists. There was the clash between the Jewish and the Greek factions. But there was also the difference in point of view between the home base and the front line.

To recognize this natural conflict between the "headquarters mind" and the men in the field is not to make a blanket indictment of those in positions of official leadership in any organization. But it does suggest the dangers inherent in leadership, those of the encrustations which form around the minds and spirits of officialdom. There is always the danger that, when it is confronted by any new situation or experience, officialdom's first question will be not, What action will be for the largest good of the cause which the

organization represents? but rather, Will our traditions be changed? Will our authority be decreased? Will our personal interests suffer?

Perfect illustrations of the hardened headquarters mind are to be found in military history. Liddell Hart has a word for it, "war-office pigeonholes," which he defines as "the ingrained conservatism of military high command, which has so often in the past entombed such proposed departures from the conventional."⁹² An American journalist once said that the British generals tried hard for four years to lose the war but were frustrated by the common soldiers. The most tragic instance of this stubborn imperviousness of G. H. Q. to changed situations is the slaughter in the Passchendale offensive, when thousands of soldiers met their death in a sea of mud on orders from superior officers who never went up to the front line trenches and did not know the conditions at all. As Lloyd George comments on this, "theirs not to reason why; theirs but to send their troops to die."⁹³

John Gunther pictures the dangers of a headquarters mentality in another realm, that of political life. Writing of the ruling group in Russia he says: "The ruling directorate is small enough to run a terrible risk of losing touch with the country as a whole. . . . As the present hierarchy hardens, congeals, into a permanent pyramidal structure, the chance increases of its isolation from the masses."⁹⁴ Always the danger of any hierarchy — losing touch with the masses.

The clash between administrators and practitioners occurs also in the field of education. Bliss Perry vividly pictures the state of affairs in that field: "The whole tendency of American institutions is to breed ten administrators to one real teacher. I used to pass University Hall [at Harvard] with something of a small boy's dread of passing a cemetery; for teachers lay buried there under their roll-top desks."⁹⁵ Education is always in danger of selling its birthright of teaching

for a mess of overhead administration. This is increased by a vicious tendency, connected with the false standard of "success," to rate a man's progress in his profession by the distance he is removed from its actual practice. The fledgling Ph.D. in a central board of education, who has hardly ever, if at all, been guilty of the lowly business of classroom teaching, is rated, both by salary and prestige, higher than the most fruitful classroom teacher in the city. The secretary of a church board, the ecclesiastical administrator of any sort, frequently stands higher than the man who is still immersed in pastoral work. Indeed this judgment could be reduced to a mathematical formula: "Success" varies directly with the distance from the actual practice of an art or profession.

Organized religion is beset with the dangers of an officialized (which often means "fossilized") mind. Rollo Walter Brown puts a familiar charge into one sentence, "It is an empty top-heavy organization that hinders the direct application of the philosophy of Jesus."⁹⁶

We get a glimpse of another danger in the exclamation of Mandell Creighton on accepting the office of bishop of London: "I shall never have time to learn anything more." Bishop Creighton learned a lot more after becoming a bishop; so have many other bishops. But the foreboding he expressed does envisage clearly the liability of ecclesiastical headquarters.

The gist of the matter seems to be that real growth, in an individual or an institution, occurs at the tip of the root rather than at the base. The grasp of the fresh, great meaning of the Christian gospel came at the frontier in Antioch, not at the headquarters in Jerusalem.

There are two immediate applications of this chapter of Acts. One concerns all who are in any way part of a headquarters group. They are charged with an indispensable task of leadership. There should be a conservative strain in their

make-up, for part of their legitimate function is to conserve gains and to preserve continuity. Yet always lurking near is the danger of mental and spiritual ossification. This they must guard against by yielding afresh to the prophetic momentum which brought the organization into being, lest spiritual life be strangled by the red tape of tradition. Those on the frontier, those in immediate contact with the creative achievement of a movement, have a parallel responsibility — to keep the whole institution alive by keeping it freshly in contact with the tasks and purposes which alone give it meaning.

THE ART OF DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Now therefore, why make ye a trial of God?

ACTS 15:10

Cadbury and Lake throw a bright light on this phrase, "make a trial of God." It means "why do you act against his declared will?" "God has sufficiently declared his will by giving his Spirit to the Gentiles and to refuse the natural conclusions to be drawn from this fact is to 'tempt God.'" "Those who refused to accept Gentiles as Christians and wished to keep Christianity within limits as a strictly Jewish sect were guilty, according to Peter, who spoke these words, of the sin of failing to draw logical conclusions from the facts.

Yet we continually fail to draw the natural and implicit conclusions from history and experience and from the words of Jesus. God is love, Jesus declares. "So what?" What does that stupendous faith mean in terms of conduct for one who holds it? Into the area of logical conclusions from that premise, we do not often enter, or we enter tentatively and timorously. Certainly the logical conclusion is not our world

as it is, criss-crossed with barbed wire fences, bristling with armaments; certainly it is not trust in hatred, in exploitation, in the security of 10 or 20 per cent interest on manipulations in human misery.

“ Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done ” — what is the logical conclusion of that? No one can carry the answer out to decimals. But surely all can say that its logical conclusion is not our present society, with millions on or under the subsistence line, clinging desperately to the edge of disaster, while a top five per cent controls half the productive wealth of the country.

“ That ye all may be one ” — what is the logical conclusion of that? Five hundred separate bodies having the name of Christian, an ineffectual congeries of debating societies, a modern version of the confusion of Babel?

There is inspiration and leading in the logical thinking of one Christian, Vida Scudder. Her social and economic views and endeavors stemmed directly from her deep religious faith. When her conception of religion was in its formative state, there developed as an integral part of it “ the conviction that the principles of the Sermon on the Mount and the brotherhood of man were a no less essential part of it than faith in God and reverence for the church.” ⁹¹

THE AUTHORITY OF HAZARDED LIVES

It seemed good unto us . . . to choose out men and send them unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have hazarded their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. ACTS 15:25-26

Here is the supreme spiritual authority and credential, the authority of hazarded lives. The Christian group at Antioch

wished to give the highest commendation to the representatives whom they were sending to a conference with the heads of the church at Jerusalem. So they sent "men who have hazarded their lives for the name of the Lord."

They might have stressed other evidences of authority. They might have written, "These men are members of our executive committee, men of standing and learning. All their papers will be found to be in perfect order." That would have been in the pattern of ecclesiastical authority so familiar to us. But the men of Antioch grasped the very genius of the Christian gospel. "Here," they wrote, "are men who have hazarded their lives." That, now as then, is the final authority of Christianity in its appeal to a skeptical world — the proof of the cross, of devoted and hazarded lives.

There is no other comparable authority. There never has been. There never will be. It was the original authority of Jesus. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me"; "I am come to give my life a ransom for many." That compelling authority of sacrificial love is expressed in one of the finest passages of the modern theater, in the speech put into the mouth of Queen Elizabeth in Clemence Dane's play *Will Shakespeare*:

" . . . I'll not bow
To the gentle Jesus of the women, I —
But to the man who hung 'twixt earth and heaven
Six mortal hours, and knew the end (as strength
And custom was) three days away, yet ruled
His soul and body so, that when the sponge
Blessed his cracked lips with promise of relief
And quick oblivion, he would not drink:
He turned his head away and would not drink:
Spat out the anodyne and would not drink.
This was a God for kings and queens of pride,
And him I follow." ⁸⁸

“ Him I follow.” So have spoken uncounted millions of men. The “ word,” the very mind of God, can never be merely words. It must always be the word made flesh, the word translated into life. Paul’s doctrine of the cross was more than words. As Leitzman writes, “ Paul had experienced his own theology of the cross.”⁸⁹ He knew what it meant to hazard his life, to be crucified with Christ. He bore the ultimate credential. Men yielded to that authority.

A dramatic instance of the power of the hazarded life is Father Damien, when on a memorable day, in addressing the congregation of lepers on the island of Molokai, instead of “ You lepers ” he said, “ We lepers.” The air was electric, for in those two words he spoke with the authority of the cross. A short time previously, he had spilt boiling water over his foot. The skin was injured but he felt no pain. That anaesthesia to pain was an unmistakable symptom of leprosy. He was paying the price for his devotion to the lepers.

The world has a very legitimate habit of interpreting what it hears in terms of what it sees. When it sees no hazard in the lives of Christians, no dangerous risk in the life of the church, naturally it hears no compulsion in the preaching of the cross. No teacher can really teach above the level of his life. As Robert Herrick put it,

“ We credit most our sight; our eye doth please
Our trust far more than ten ear-witnesses.”

The church, or those within the church, eager for its standing and prestige, reach out for all sorts of authority. We make gestures of gratitude to scientists and philosophers into whose words we can read some evidence of intellectual respectability for Christian belief, not realizing that our pathetic eagerness for such backing from intellectuals is often testimony of a poverty of real faith, of a spiritual inferiority complex. Bystanders could almost be forgiven for assuming, after listening to some of our Christian apologists, that it was

of Eddington or Jeans or Whitehead that the words were spoken, "On this rock will I build my church." Churches have been eager for the specious authority of wealth and social position. They lose sight of the only authority which speaks with a compelling voice, that of service and sacrifice, of hazarded life in a world of need.

A QUARREL IS A FEVER

A sharp contention arose. ACTS 15:39

A shorter and uglier word for "contention" is "quarrel." The Greek word here used, *parozusmos*, is "sometimes quoted as a medical term. But among doctors it appears to mean 'the height of a fever.'" ⁹⁸ The use of this medical term in the original version of Acts is peculiarly apt. A quarrel is a noxious form of fever, and has many of the marks of fever. It is a symptom and manifestation that something is wrong in mind and heart. The rising temperature of the fever impairs ability to use one's mind. This quarrel over Mark quite evidently impaired Paul's ability to use his mind. G. K. Chesterton showed genuine insight when he said that "the worst thing about a quarrel is that it stops an argument." An argument is an exercise of the mind; a quarrel is a fever.

Religion has suffered immeasurably from the fevers which have been raised by it. The city of Jerusalem has been appropriately called "Christianity's worst argument," on account of the factional struggles which have taken place there. There is much real psychological and spiritual truth in the Talmud's recommendation to a man "not to open his mouth unto Satan," for cursing disturbs the air and may incite the demons hovering therein." ⁹⁹ The impassioned words of a quarrel do incite demons.

Check the rising temperature of fever.

BACKTRACKING ON ALEXANDER THE GREAT

They came to Troas. ACTS 16:8

There is historical interest in the fact that in part of this journey, which eventually led him into Europe, Paul was following, in a reverse direction, the route of Alexander the Great's march of conquest to the East. Here at Troas Paul was backtracking on Alexander. If we let our imagination play with that fact it becomes very dramatic and suggestive.

Two men, Alexander the Great and Jesus, stand in vivid contrast. Both aimed to conquer the world. Both died in youth, at the age of about thirty. Alexander moved toward the East. Jesus, through his disciple Paul, moved toward the West. Alexander was accompanied by a glittering cavalcade that carried death and destruction in its train. Jesus' progress was anything but a triumphal march; it was represented by a few itinerant preachers on foot. Alexander's was the old conquest of physical power, the pomp and panoply of war. Paul's was a new warfare and a new conquest, the warfare of the spirit for a God of love. When Alexander marched by Troy he represented the old tale of Troy — assault, stratagem, hard power. But Paul at Troas represented a new tale of Troy — a vision of human need which came to him there, and of his response to that need, in a spirit of daring love.

The world needs to backtrack on Alexander — to start moving in a direction opposite to that he took, to bring into play a new force. There is profound present pertinence in the verses so often recited in the schools of a former generation:

“ How big was Alexander, Pa,
That people called him great?
Was he like old Goliath, tall? ”

The father tries to explain:

“ ’Twas not his stature made him great
But greatness of his name.
I mean, my child, his actions were
So great he got a name.”

But the boy persists:

“ Did killing people make him great? ”

The answer to that question, given as the armaments pile up feverishly in Germany, Italy, France, Russia, England, Japan, the United States, is: “ Alexander was pretty big. He was big enough to serve as the supreme model for our twentieth century civilization.”

But in every one of those countries there are others who look more closely, who measure more accurately the symbolic figure of the armed marauding warrior and bring in a different verdict: “ Alexander is not big enough for our world. He is too small for the vast interdependencies of this day. The world needs a different master, one going in the opposite direction and employing a different sort of power.”

HOW TO MEET AN ANTICLIMAX

*We sat down and spake unto the women that were
come there.* ACTS 16:13

This verse presents about as perfect an anticlimax as can be imagined. In the preceding verses we are told of Paul's vision of a man who appealed to him to come over into Macedonia, an invitation, apparently, on behalf of a whole country. “ And when he had seen the vision straightway we sought to go ” — a momentous step involving a whole

change of strategy, indeed, a new life plan. Yet when, with his memory warmed by this vision, he reached Macedonia, what did he find? A few women sitting beside a river!

This chapter in Paul's history pictures perfectly what happens when a great vision is followed by the first concrete realities which may lead to its realization. The only way to keep a vision glorious is to leave it a vision. The effort to translate any hope into reality involves what seems to be a chilling anticlimax. That is the point where many who have seen visions and cherished hopes quit cold. Bunyan places the Slough of Despond at the very start of Christian's journey to the Celestial City. With eyes set on heaven, the Pilgrim stumbles into a swamp.

The young preacher goes out from the theological seminary as Paul went into Europe. He has heard a call from a world of need. But when he arrives at the first landing place, he usually finds just what Paul found — a few women. And his situation is different from Paul's, for often the women are not at a prayer meeting but at a Ladies Aid supper. He has to fall back heavily for comfort on the text, "Where two or three are gathered together. . . ." As he tackles the prosaic details which somehow did not appear in the vision, he can appreciate the feeling of the young Roman patrician, going from the schools of the rhetoricians to the camp of the army in Gaul, who exclaimed, "O Plato, Plato, what a task for a philosopher!" Robert Morrison saw a vision of a man of China beseeching him to come over into China and help the Chinese. Before his imagination passed the millions of China. He literally went out to save a world. But he did not find even a few women at prayer. He labored seven years before he baptized his first convert. When he died in 1834 after thirty years' work in China, he had seen only ten converts baptized!

Yet Paul went on with what he had. If there was no great

crowd waiting for him, he had no doubt that God was waiting for him. And he welcomed as fulfillment even the smallest beginning in the translation of the vision into the language of the concrete. The great apostolic art to be practiced in all centuries is that of recognizing the fulfillment of vision when it comes, even though it wear an unexpected or unattractive face. Any spot where a dream finds even the faintest incarnation in real situations is holy ground.

Bliss Perry has drawn a memorable portrait of Louis Agassiz: "He was never happier than when he was standing in front of a blackboard in a crossroads schoolhouse before an audience of farmers, armed with a clam shell and a piece of chalk."¹⁰⁰ Hardly the expected audience for a world-famous scientist. But a superb audience for anyone with the soul of a real teacher, such as Agassiz was. For there was the thing grander than any mere dream. There was the actual teaching opportunity, and nothing ever dimmed its glory.

LADIES AID SOCIETY

She was baptized, and her household. ACTS 16:15

The first Christian group in Europe was a Ladies Aid Society. No other term will describe it quite so well. Lydia and her household and friends gave the first aid, a great aid, to the planting of Christianity in Europe. That beginning is very fitting in view of the long and glorious history of women in the church. In every chapter of the church's history Christian women have been an indispensable aid in its great adventures.

One of his biographers writes of the Arabian traveler, C. M. Doughty: "He goes, this good man, this Englishman, into the heart of hostile Arabia. Doughty was the first

Englishman they had met. He predisposed them to give a chance to other men of his race, because they found him honorable and good. So he broke a road for his religion." A high and beautiful tribute — "he broke a road for his religion." Lydia broke a road for Paul's religion and her own. Countless women have been road-breakers for their religion, throwing up in the desert a highway for their God.

It must seem at times that Paul made a poor return for the help given him by the Philippi Ladies Aid Society. He seems so slow to recognize the contribution, real and potential, of women to the cause of Christ. Whatever may have been the causes for his attitude to women, unquestionably his mind had a blind spot there. The church inherited that blind spot. It has accepted the great and unceasing material contributions of women, but it has been stupid in failing to avail itself of their measureless resources for spiritual work. It has exploited women for money-making. Again and again, thousands of times over, women have come to the church with Paul's question on their lips, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" The church has answered, "Bake a chocolate cake or make a quilt." We have taken the fine gold of women's devotion and stamped it into a flat coin.

Today and in the days to come, there is tremendous need of a Ladies Aid for the extension of the essential Christian idea into all fields of life, for sensitizing the conscience of mankind by woman's sympathy and insight. Vida Scudder writes that she "had to strive to permeate the middle class with the conviction that the social order in which its members moved tranquil and prosperous should be intolerable to any decent person."⁹⁷ She had to do whatever she was allowed to do to help oppressed people break their bonds, whether they were oppressed on account of class, race or sex. Her settled purpose was to "work within the church for the Christian revolution."

THE ATTENTION OF AN OPENED HEART

Lydia . . . whose heart the Lord opened to give heed unto the things that were spoken by Paul.

ACTS 16:14

There is an interesting sequence of events here. The Lord opened Lydia's heart so that she gave attention to what Paul was saying. A spiritual experience resulted in a mental application. That is an aspect of religious experience which has often been absent. Generally people whose hearts have been moved are willing to give almost everything but close attention. They will give a shout; they will give a testimony; sometimes they will give a dollar, or several dollars. But often they will not give what Lydia gave — attention, real heed to the message, so that they may realize clearly what it means and involves for themselves and the world. Their religion remains an emotional disturbance. They are, to use William James' phrase, "intellectual noncombatants." They are like H. G. Wells' croquet player, who says plaintively: "I do realize that our present world is going to pieces. I'm ready to fall in with anything promising. But if I'm to *think*, that's too much." ¹⁰⁶

To give heed, actually to bring the mind into vigorous action, is a costly offering, the last full measure of devotion. We speak frequently of counting heads. It is a fine phrase. Heads are what count most in any cause. But unfortunately we count heads only by quantity, not by quality. Often when the heart is opened nothing happens in the head. Foggy, sentimental thinking has popularly been taken as a mark of saintliness.

Without really costly attention, the Christian revelation becomes a sort of jumble, which like the "new" poetry can be read backwards as intelligently as forwards, or like the

“new” painting can be exhibited upside down. It is the mark of an inexperienced novelist, writes John Brophy, to put a powerful situation at the beginning of his story, and then fail to realize, or at least to examine, the inevitable implications. The gospel story begins with the most powerful initial situation in all history — “The word became flesh and dwelt among us,” but the inexperienced Christian fails to realize the inevitable implications.

One who is outside the Christian church shows a better understanding of these implications. “This doctrine of the kingdom of God,” writes H. G. Wells, “which was the main teaching of Jesus, and which plays so small a part in the Christian creeds, is certainly one of the most revolutionary doctrines that ever stirred and changed human thought. . . . It was no less than a bold and uncompromising demand for a complete change and cleansing of the life of our struggling race, an utter cleansing, without and within. . . . Is it any wonder that to this day this Galilean is too much for our small hearts?”¹⁰⁷

EXPLOITED WOMEN

*A certain maid with a spirit of divination met us,
who brought her masters much gain by soothsaying.*

ACTS 16:16

This story of a girl who was being used for profit reminds us that the manner of exploitation changes, but the evil thing goes on. It is impossible now to determine just what was peculiar about this girl, who seemed to her contemporaries to be “inspired” by Apollo. The word used in the original to describe her means literally “pregnant” with a god. Foakes-Jackson says, “A modern physician might declare

that the girl was insane. Her utterances were so remarkable that she had been purchased and exploited and proved a profitable investment to her owners.”¹⁰¹

Whatever the condition of the girl, the narrative makes very clear the fact of her financial exploitation. Her owners cared nothing about her as a person. Her welfare, her restoration to normal mental life would have meant to them only interference with their “much gain.”

In the so-called civilized countries of today's world undisguised slavery is no longer met. True, we easily forget that slavery still exists over large portions of the earth, and that in parts of the United States, as in the sharecropper country of the south and in certain mining sections, there obtain conditions of peonage which are little, if at all, better than slavery. But actual slavery is unfamiliar. We look back on that long black chapter, its darkest pages those that recount the exploitation of women, as something now happily ended. It is a ghastly record, dotted with such bookkeeping entries as that in 1455, in Lagos in West Africa, one horse purchased eighteen slaves, but half a century later only twelve. At the same time, at Rio des Sestos, the price of one slave was two shaving basins. Then the discovery of America advanced the price of human beings and made Africa “perhaps the scene of greater continuous misery than any other spot on the surface of the globe.”¹⁰²

But in two far-reaching fields the ruthless exploitation of women, of which we have a pathetic glimpse in this narrative of Acts, goes on. One is prostitution, the other is industry. There is a connection between starvation wages for women and the vice ring. The Florence Crittenden League, in 1936, published the history of five hundred and sixty-one delinquent and wayward girls, which shows clearly the economic picture: “When they became delinquents, 33 had earned as little as \$2.50 weekly; 21 had earned \$3.75; 84 had earned

\$5; 85 had earned \$8; 58 had earned \$10; 34 had earned \$12; 38 had earned \$15; and only 15 had earned more than \$16. Thirty had been without jobs when they became delinquent, 39 had never been employed, and 83 were schoolgirls. These figures indicate quite clearly that, despite all moral indignation, prostitution is a comparatively advantageous profession — for a few years. It is the best job these girls can get.”¹⁰³

Here is a glimpse of the industrial situation in Michigan in 1937: “According to a report of the Women’s Bureau of the federal department of labor, during a representative week in 1934, half of the women employed in eighteen out of twenty-two types of manufacturing industry earned less than \$14; half of those employed in limited-price stores earned less than \$12.35; and half of the women laundry employees earned less than \$9.50.”¹⁰⁴

In 1936 the United States department of agriculture made a study of wage scales in Tennessee. “At that time one-twelfth of the women employed in Tennessee industry received less than \$5 a week; one-third less than \$10; and fewer than one-half, as much as \$12. Only one in twenty-seven received \$20 or more. The highest wages paid to women were found to be in the printing industry, where labor is best organized. Textiles, with the exception of silk fabrics, paid wages slightly above the median, which was \$12 for women and \$16 for men. Among machine workers, makers of work clothing were the lowest paid, nearly 60 per cent of them receiving less than \$10 a week. Among workers generally the lowest wages were found to be those paid Negro women employed to shell nuts. The earnings of this group averaged just over \$2.50.”¹⁰⁵

These figures give no adequate idea of the results in human misery, but they help us understand the violent opposition of those who make “much gain” from the traffic in women to all efforts to establish a minimum standard of wages. The

story in Acts is up to date. Its point is that the evangelists of the Christian gospel brought release to the captive through compassionate and courageous action. That story must be continued.

WHEN CHRISTIANITY MEETS PATRIOTIC HYSTERIA

But when her masters saw that the hope of their gain was gone, they laid hold on Paul and Silas. . . . And when they had brought them unto the magistrates they said, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and set forth customs which it is not lawful for us to receive, or observe, being Romans.

ACTS 16:19-21

Here is such a perfect parallel to present-day arguments against Christian teaching and action that it might almost be taken as an exact transcript of testimony in a contemporary "red hunt" or in a cooked-up, hysterical investigation like that of the ludicrous Dies congressional committee on subversive activities in the summer of 1938. This is one of the first occasions on which the charge of unpatriotic conduct is lodged against Christian evangelists. And, very characteristically, the holy emotion of patriotism is invoked by people whose financial profits are being decreased by the Christians.

It was a technique which worked perfectly in Paul's day and works just as well today. Notice the oily suavity with which these profiteers proclaim their civic devotion — these interlopers "exceedingly trouble our city." Notice how deftly they conceal their devotion to a financial racket under cover of devotion to Rome. They brand the disciples as foreigners — and arouse nationalist feeling. They oppose

them as Jews — and stir up racial hatred. They accuse them of spreading new ideas — and enlist the opposition of traditionalists. They declare that the disciples are against Rome — and bring in the “patriotic” argument, the present equivalent of which is that a thing is “un-American,” even when the thing opposed is so thoroughly American as the right of free speech.

One detail worth noting in this account is that no mention is made of the only thing in the whole case worth discussing at all — restoring the girl to mental health and thus freeing her from cruel exploitation. Similar primary questions, such as labor’s right to organize, wages and hours, are evaded nowadays in a fanfare of propaganda about the American flag and the evils of communism.

In Paul’s day distortion of issues had to be accomplished by word of mouth. Today it can be done by print. George Seldes makes the observation that “if the Associated Press had reported the Boston Tea Party it would probably have been an indignant story of reds defying authority and destroying property.”¹⁰⁸ If Ephesus had had a newspaper dominated by the financial interests of the city, it would probably have reported one of Paul’s evangelistic efforts after this fashion:

From the *Ephesus Mercury*, June, A.D. 52:

“This city was the scene of a violent and disgraceful riot this last week instigated by subversive attacks on Ephesian business men, fomented by irresponsible hotheads, led by the notorious agitator Paul, alias Saul, an escaped jailbird. This person has been confined in many jails, was recently released from jail in Philippi. Not content with blasphemous attacks on religion he let loose infamous attacks on the commercial interests of the city, particularly the silver business. In spite of the misguided interference with the mob by our town clerk,

a man long suspected of anarchist leanings, the culprits were driven from the city. The chamber of commerce, supported by the Sons of the Israelitish Revolution, has taken steps to insure that they shall not return.”

This story makes clear what happens when people allow the beat of patriotic tom-toms in behalf of profit-making to drug their minds: they become part of the forces that resist the coming of the kingdom of God.

BUT ABOUT MIDNIGHT

But about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns unto God . . . and there was a great earthquake.

ACTS 16:25-26

The little conjunction “but” is one of the most important words in every language. It is always a dramatic word. It is the cue for a turn in the story. When it appears the plot thickens. “But” indicates opposite extremes of human mood and action. At the one extreme we have the “yes-but” fellowship, the people who spend their life on a fence and are quick to discern contrary considerations to any line of action, so that they are condemned to remain spiritually in neutral gear. “I believe in peace — *but*”; “I’d like to do it — *but*.” That doleful song is very familiar.

There is another sort of “but” which has the thrill of life in it. We meet it often in the Book of Acts. One of the exalting things about Acts is the way the story goes on when by any reasonable logic it ought to be all over. Again and again there appears a divine and human rebuttal to the most overwhelming argument. Such an argument was made by the authorities who imprisoned Paul and Silas in Philippi — the conclusive argument of prison doors and barred windows.

That, anyone with sound sense would say, is the end of the story. But there was no period there. As Paul made the story, there was merely a comma for a pause, or at most a semicolon for a full breath. Paul went on with the story till he came to an exclamation point. That, to him, was the divine punctuation of life. "But about midnight," praise and prayer brought a new mood. The plot thickens mysteriously. New forces are brought into play. Darkness and prison doors — *but*. To Paul the story goes on always with two words — *but God*.

The tragedy of so many lives is that they have no continuing "but's." Difficulties are final. Efforts come to a full stop at a dead end. And often that stop comes just at the place where, with a disjunctive "but," a new chapter might have been started. One of the dramatic episodes of the World War occurred when the Allied fleet at the Dardanelles retired before an enemy whose last shot had been fired.¹¹⁰

A penetrating question for all of us is, How do we use the word "but"?

PRESCRIPTION FOR AN EARTHQUAKE

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.

ACTS 16:31

These words were first spoken during an earthquake. The Philippian jailer felt his familiar world being rocked under him. In his fright, he thought it might be the end of the world — the end, certainly, of his job, and possibly of his life if his prisoners escaped through the doors that had been jarred open. In that extremity he asked gropingly about a means of being saved. Paul answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." His prescription holds for any time of convulsion and upheaval, political, economic or social.

No one needs to be told today that ours is a shaken earth. As Nicholas Berdyaev has put it in three vivid sentences: "The secular foundations of the West are trembling; things apparently stabilized by use and want are shifting. Nowhere and in no single matter is solid earth felt under foot. We are on volcanic ground and any eruption is possible, material or spiritual."

The Acts narrative is strikingly true to life in one respect particularly: it is in a time of earthquake, of dislocation, that inquiries about salvation are made. That is one of the great intellectual and spiritual potentialities of a crisis. When an automobile is rolling along the road in tolerable form, no one in the car raises fundamental questions about its machinery. It is only when it fails as a going enterprise, when something more serious than a flat tire or lack of gasoline is obviously wrong with it, that the bewildered driver inquires, "What must we do to be saved?" And it was not in the banquet hall but in the pigpen, dining on husks, that the Prodigal Son got around to asking fundamental questions about his way of life and possible salvation from it.

So it was with humanity after the World War. After that earthquake a large part of the world came forward to the mourner's bench asking, "What must we do to be saved from another such convulsion?" But the questioning grew fainter as memory of the earthquake receded. The depression also brought terrified inquiries. From 1930 to 1934 there was more serious questioning than ever before of the nature and working of the economic order in the United States. The disturbance could not be settled by the lusty singing of "Happy days are here again." Obviously happy days were not here. They are not here yet, although, now that the economic seismograph records less violent disturbance, the privileged owners of big business are denying their questioning of a few years ago and saying, "Just skip that. We were a bit jumpy, that is all."

Paul's prescription is still good — "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." "There is none other name given among men whereby we must be saved." Only in a way of life which harmonizes with the moral grain of the universe, in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, is salvation to be found. Every day's attempt to find it in some other manner makes that increasingly clear.

The bankruptcy of long-trusted means of salvation is relentlessly proclaimed by Stephen Vincent Benét:

"You will not be saved by General Motors or the prefabricated house;
You will not be saved by dialectic materialism or the Lambeth Conference;
You will not be saved by Vitamin D or the expanding universe.
In fact you will not be saved."¹¹¹

For half a century science raised delirious hopes of an automatic solution. The proud boast was sung:

"Philosophy will clip an angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, the gnomed mine,
Unweave a rainbow."

But science has not emptied the haunted air. It has filled it with demons in the form of bomb-dropping airplanes, more terrifying than any specter that ever haunted the minds of primitive savages.

Hope must come from more enduring sources than the gadgets of a secular civilization. When Baron d'Aureville read Huysmans' pessimistic book *À Rebours*, he said grimly that there was nothing left for the author but "the point of a revolver or the foot of the cross." That is the world's alternative today.

SOLUTIONS WHICH EVADE VITAL ISSUES

But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us publicly uncondemned, men that are Romans, and have cast us into prison, and do they now cast us out privily? Nay, verily; but let them come themselves and bring us out.

ACTS 16:37

Paul's vigorous refusal to be pushed out of prison surreptitiously, by the back door, so that the officials who had unjustly imprisoned and beat him and Silas might "save face" and avoid trouble, presents one of the most attractive and stirring pictures of him to be found in the New Testament. Paul was not the man ever to put his own personal safety before the demand for justice. His answer to the suggestion that he slink off quietly, grateful that his own skin was saved, was a resounding "No!" He refused to accept a solution which did not face the vital issues at stake, his rights as a Roman citizen. Paul knew his Roman law. Roman citizens were protected against flogging by the *Lex Valeria* and the *Lex Porcia*. Yet it was doubtless not only the demand for justice which prompted him. He insisted on an apology from the Philippian officials because that "would save [his] adherents who remained in the city, at least for a time, from brutal outrage."¹⁰⁹

Paul, in his refusal to accept an evasive solution, is a good model to follow today. But to imitate Paul demands his knowledge of the issues and his courageous insistence that they be faced. The temptation to accept compromise which leaves basic wrongs untouched is always insidious, for it usually promises an ending of immediate controversy and trouble. This is one of the great temptations of Christian people as they face the injustices and evils of our time.

The history of industrial conflicts is full of such premature

and evasive solutions. Wrongs similar to those inflicted on Paul are perpetrated — unlawful beatings and imprisonments. And the advice given to the public and to the churches by those responsible, is just that given by the jailer to Paul: "Run along now and don't make any fuss about this." Too often that advice has been followed. Fundamental wrongs have been allowed to go on, because that was the easiest thing to do. In this day of fresh skirmishes in labor's long struggle for a fairer share in its product, Christian people must pronounce Paul's mighty monosyllable NO to solutions which do not go to the roots of injustice. They must learn that charity is no solution of the problem of poverty, that armaments are no solution of the problem of war.

KEEPING IN THE ACTIVE VOICE

And they went out of prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren they comforted them, and departed. ACTS 16:40

It is worth noting that the word "comfort" is used here in the active voice. That is the usual syntax with Paul. It was he and Silas who did the comforting. Considering what they had been through, we should think that they might well be excused for stepping out of the active voice and relaxing languorously into the passive, in which they would not minister but be ministered to. They had just got out of jail; they had been beaten cruelly; they had been through an earthquake. Surely, if there were any comforting to be done, Paul and Silas were the ones to be comforted. Many of us latter-day saints would have known exactly what, in the way of attention, we were entitled to after such misfortunes. We would have settled into the passive voice in a hurry. We

would have said, "Get me to bed quickly. Get me something to eat. Send for a doctor. I've had a terrible time. I'll probably die."

Paul never learned that language of "poor me." He was a disciple of One who came, not to be ministered unto but to minister. Jesus was the Master who kept his life in the active voice.

It is so easy to spend life in the passive voice, waiting to be ministered to by others, to be comforted, to be pitied and soothed. One of the greatest wastes in the world is emotion directed into futile self-pity and self-concern, when it might be channeled into action.

THE ROUTINE OF RIOT

. . . Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as was his custom, went in unto them.

ACTS 17:1-2

What was Paul's custom? It was to take part in the synagogue meeting, to preach Jesus and the resurrection, and to face the dispute, the riot, the stoning and imprisonment that followed inevitably. We can almost imagine Paul facing another day: "Let's see. What's the program today? Another riot." So, as was his custom, he went through with it.

Here is his own version of the routine: "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep" (II Cor. 11:24-25).

How many subtle rationalizations we could have found to justify our omitting "the custom"! Suppose it were our custom to give such clear witness to the Christian faith and purpose that it brought a real disturbance!

ANALYZING AN UPROAR

But the Jews being moved with jealousy, took unto them certain vile fellows of the rabble, and gathering a crowd, set the city in an uproar. ACTS 17:5

The mob violence against Paul in Thessalonica came in large measure from the failure of the citizens to analyze an uproar. The disturbance was created by interested parties, moved by purposes of their own, animated by jealousy and fear. They made it appear that the Christian preachers were vicious and dangerous persons. The populace, seeing the uproar, did not ask what was behind it, and many joined in it.

Much of the opposition to the Christian church in its early days came from this failure on the part of the people to analyze an uproar. Much of the opposition to it today comes from the same source. It has hardly been possible during the last few years to open a newspaper without finding some story of an "uproar" following the pattern of this one in Acts. People with profits and privileges to defend start an attack on some group (often on the Federal Council of Churches, which they accuse of being "communistic"). Every appeal to prejudice and self-interest is brought in to smear with opprobrium Christian people who oppose such a blueprint of fascism for America as the May conscription bill of 1938, or protest against the lawless violence of tear gas, shotguns and hired thugs used by employers against strikers. Many citizens make no attempt to analyze the forces that create the uproar or their partisan and selfish reasons for doing so.

An extreme illustration of this technique occurred during the trial of Angelo Herndon, Georgia Negro, who was arrested under an ancient law, uninvoked for many years, because he had led a parade of unemployed workers. At his trial the prosecution informed the jury, "This is not only a

trial of Angelo Herndon, but of Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky and Kerensky, and every white person who believes that black and white should unite for the purpose of setting up a nigger soviet republic in the Black Belt.”¹¹² Stirred by this profound interpretation of the issue, the jury brought in a verdict of guilty, and a sentence of eighteen to twenty years in prison was pronounced. Fortunately, the Supreme Court clearly analyzed that particular uproar and reversed the decision.

That case is extreme, but it follows a general pattern. We had a pernicious uproar in the whipping up of the Spanish-American War, declared after Spain had agreed to every demand of the United States, because the war spirit had been deliberately created. Yet there were some minds which could see behind the uproar to the sinister forces in the background. William James wrote, “The whole situation has been a morally rotten one from the word go.”¹¹³

Here, for instance, is a very contemporary uproar — the loud howl which is raised all over the country because of the weight of taxation. It is a tremendous problem. It ought to excite the deep concern of every citizen. Yet how many ever analyze the uproar, to discover what it ultimately implies? They are content with an easy target for their anger. They denounce the unemployed as worthless. They denounce the government and the New Deal. Yet they do not turn their indignation where it ought to be turned, against the thing behind the uproar — an economic system which shuts down factories when people need shoes and bakeries when people need bread.

The mental lassitude and gullibility which prevent analysis of distortions of fact are genuine and deadly sin. “An American reporter in Leningrad, shortly after the October revolution in 1917, interviewed a former minister of the czar in his prison cell. He asked him if he had anything to complain of. ‘I have no right to complain,’ said the former minister,

‘ because I have been guilty of a great crime, a most awful crime, of not understanding the spirit of my age.’ ”¹¹⁴

Not understanding — a most awful crime indeed! It is a crime, a sin, not to see and measure and expose the undercover forces which are working against the kingdom of God today.

THE UPSETTERS

These that have turned the world upside down have come hither also.

ACTS 17:6

This has been the continual charge against thoroughgoing Christians from the far yesterday until today, that they upset things as they are. The charge, in the sense in which it is made, is usually false, but far too much attention is paid to refuting it, and far too little to living up to it and deserving it. That charge of being an upsetting force in a settled world is a high tribute and an unconsciously accurate appraisal of the real nature of Christian truth. It is an upsetting force when it is let loose in the world in full strength. If we never upset anything or anybody we may well wonder how Christian we are.

“ Those who have turned the world upside down ” — how well would those words describe us? We upset the world? Why, we wouldn't upset a teacup! Here is a review, which appeared in one of the leading religious periodicals in America, of a volume of sermons preached in a rich suburban church: “ These sermons lack something basic and vital in our contemporary life. There is never a note or a phrase which will in any sense disturb the complacency of the ——— millionaires. Preached in a world of suffering and unemployment and wars and exploitation, they are full

of sweetness and light and literary charm, and detour around the conflict of our times, or leap completely above it." Many of us grow quite skillful at the detour and the leap!

If there is anything wrong side up in our world, we ought to turn it upside down.

CONTRARY TO CAESAR

These all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar.

ACTS 17:7

This is a sample of charges frequently made against Christianity, charges at once false and true. There is the charge, for instance, that Christians active in the cause of the rights of labor are "against" law and order. That is untrue. Yet when the slogan "law and order" is made a camouflage for violating the rights of labor and, as often happens, the law of the land, Christians are indeed against it. There is the charge that Christians engaged in social action are "opposed to business." That is false. Yet when the business involves sweatshop wages and industrial feudalism, it is true indeed.

Paul and Silas were not doing anything contrary to Caesar. They were paying far more allegiance to Caesar than the lawless rabble who attacked them. But then, as now, a good rule for rabble-rousers is, "When all else fails, wave the flag." Drag in the magic name of Caesar, it is sure to intoxicate emotional people who do all their thinking with their blood and nerves, rather than with their minds.

It is the same thing here as in Thessalonica. Patriotic hysteria is being used and will be used by parties whose real interest is defense of their own privileges and profit. So we see a Hague in Jersey City waving the flag to cover up denial of civil liberties. We see steel companies waving the flag to

cover up lawless shooting of unarmed workers and bystanders. When fascism comes to America it will not be labeled "Made in Germany"; it will not even be called fascism; it will be called Americanism. And those who so call it will be taking their place with the hoarse-throated throng which hounded Paul and Silas.

Yet the charge was true then, in a far deeper sense than it was meant. Christianity *was* contrary to Caesar, in that its message was a power terribly subversive of the hard might of pagan Rome. Christianity must always be opposed to Caesar when Caesar is elevated to the place of God. Caesar, or the almighty state, is being placed on God's throne today. In the words of one of the worshipers of the state, Oswald Spengler, "the dreary train of world improvers has now come to the end of its amble through these centuries, leaving behind it, as sole monument of its existence, mountains of printed paper. The Caesars will now take its place."

Christ is indeed contrary to the decrees of Caesar.

THE MAN WHO STAYS BEHIND

The brethren sent forth Paul to go as far as to the sea: and Silas and Timothy abode there still.

ACTS 17:14

As we read the story of what happened at Berea — the Jews of Thessalonica coming "stirring up and troubling the multitudes" (Acts 17:13), with the inevitable consequences of tumult, assault and arrest — we cannot resist the feeling that in going on with his journey, Paul chose "the better part." When one's message has stirred up trouble it is more pleasant to push on to the next town than to stay behind and "face the music." Our sympathies go out to Silas and Timothy who stayed behind to live with the results of Paul's preaching.

To say this is not to accuse Paul of cowardice. Paul's courage needs no defense. It is just that in the division of labor at this particular point, the men who "abode there," in view of all that was sure to come had difficult roles. Paul was the great traveler, the pioneer. Succeeding generations have been so taken with the glamor of his missionary journeys that they have greatly underestimated the contributions made to the spread of Christianity and the founding of the church by those who stayed behind and did the "mopping up."

This division of the forces — one to go on, two to remain on the post — gives us a fresh angle of vision on the importance of the work of the local pastor and church in today's life. There is need for the itinerant prophet, the man who brings awakening and inspiration, who raises troublesome questions and pricks consciences. But it ought also to be recognized that if that stirring is not to be ephemeral, if the message is to find a permanent habitation in the minds and lives of people, it is the man who stays behind who has the more difficult and dangerous job. It is one thing to make a rousing denunciation of "the capitalistic system" and then leave by the eleven-o'clock train for distant points. It is quite another thing to bring ethical and religious criticism of accepted ways of life, and then stay in the same spot where everyone who is offended can readily get at one. It is easy for a man who is in a comparatively bomb-proof job — a professor of homiletics in a theological seminary, let us say — to drop in on a church conference and sound a battle cry against the forces of evil. It is quite another thing to sound the same cry when the forces of evil do not have to train their guns on a moving train which is carrying Peter the Hermit rapidly away, but can get an accurate aim at a local pastor working in the next block.

All honor, then, to the men who stay behind, to the enduring workers in the local church, whose ministry has high

visibility at all times and who dare to "abide" with the results of their preaching. In the arduous and, at times, seemingly hopeless task of making the mind of the nation Christian, lo, their names lead all the rest. There is a familiar Broadway axiom that it is much harder to cast a play than to write it. That is true of the Christian drama, at any rate. It is much harder to find actors who will faithfully play the role of Christian disciples than it is to write the text of far-reaching plans and programs.

Each generation needs its pioneers and trail makers, its Pauls, but without Timothy and Silas, who stay behind and abide and build, any inspiration is but a passing wind.

OBSERVATION AND INDIGNATION

His spirit was provoked within him as he beheld the city full of idols.

ACTS 17:16

Evidently there was a sensitive connection between Paul's eyes and his heart and mind. He walks about the city of Athens, observes it carefully, sees the omnipresent idols; and his spirit is provoked. Observation gives rise to passion. The eye transmits a spark to the mind.

It is a combination of capacities deeply needed. Often people have no deep passion, no indignation at evil, no sympathy, partly because they are incapable of accurate observation. Their eyes are poor reporters. Sluggishness of heart, complacent serenity, undisturbed aplomb amid scenes that should stir passionate indignation, are first of all the sin of a dull and lazy eye.

Diligent promotion of the capacity to see is a primary Christian virtue. Accurate and fine observation is the basis of many arts. The man who never sees accurately the color

of foliage or flowers, or the lines of a face, will never be a great painter or a master of literary art. It is not enough that a person be an "artist to his fingertips"; he must be one to his eyelids.

True, observation alone is not enough. The years since the war have produced a good many clear-eyed literary and sociological realists who have turned in sharp photographs of the human scene, accurate social studies done in the spirit of a keen, scientific observer. They are without sensitive Christian sympathy. Yet good eyesight is basic. If we saw clearly and intensely what goes on in our city or neighborhood, there would be much more provoking of spirit. The most stirring reading matter produced today is the reports of men and women who have seen so clearly that their minds and hearts are deeply moved. Such a rare combination of eye and heart is found in Paul De Kruif. He pleads fervently that medical discovery be made effective in the service of the people. With provoked spirit he places the blame for the insistent toll of death on indifference and greed, and with a Christian sense of values he declares that private profit "must not stand in the way of the right of one human being to live."¹¹⁵

Our tragic misuse of the land has stirred those who feel deeply and see clearly the potential service to life of land treated as God's holy earth. Thus the indignation of a foreign observer, Odette Kuhn, flames to white heat as she looks at the criminal waste of a people's heritage in eroded farm lands and poverty-stricken farmers.¹¹⁶

The same diligent eye and compassionate heart are back of Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White's book, *You Have Seen Their Faces*, with its pictures of baffled and frustrated people, and back of Archibald MacLeish's *Land of the Free*, which describes the painful odyssey of the homeless who are being hurried along the road to nowhere. And eye and heart cooperated in the two Smith College teachers who re-

ported on the child workers of America: "No less than half a million children under fifteen work for wages as low as 3 to 5 cents an hour for from 10 to 14 hours a day! No less than a million children under fifteen slave on farms for no wages at all — except the pitiful stipend their parents receive for *family* labor! These inhuman practices not only irreparably damage them for productive labor when they reach stunted maturity, but are the basis of many of our industrial and agricultural difficulties." ¹¹⁷

"Beheld" — "provoked"!

MADE OUT OF ONE

*And he made of one every nation of men to dwell on
all the face of the earth.* ACTS 17:26

This first century affirmation is the world's chief battleground today. It is vehemently denied in theory, in fact, in faith and in hope. Behind the hysterical fanaticism of a Hitler, shouting hoarsely into the ears of the world, and behind the aping of him by a Mussolini, lies the denial that God has made out of one every nation.

The faith expressed in these words is in the very center of first century Christian history. It has become the very center of the history we are making. Its denial in the interest of a totalitarian state sounds the command to the world, "Backward, march!" All these fantastic theories of race purity, race superiority, Nordics and Aryans are just what Julian Huxley calls them, "a vast scientific hoax." They are race chauvinism masquerading as science.

The fact that this hoax is taken seriously by multitudes in nazi Germany, and that similar theories, less grotesquely expressed, lie at the base of the notion of "white supremacy" in

other nations, is just one evidence that we still live in an "age of fable" — racial fable, beside which the legends of Greek gods look like sober reason. It was a great day for dictators when they discovered anthropology. Not that they could pronounce the word or knew anything about the subject. But they had a sure sense that there was gold in those hills, something that could be used as a pretentious, pseudo-scientific footnote to useful nonsense. All this would be amusing if it were not part of the obscene terror that stalks the earth.

The faith, expressed by Paul, that every nation is "made out of one" is the foundation for an enduring world. On this battlefield science joins religion as an ally. We have heard much of the conflict between science and religion. Here is the major conflict of our time in which science and religion join arms against arrant nonsense and the forces of hell. But before we enlist for the war, we must ask ourselves whether, in actuality, we are not fighting on the wrong side. How free are we from the snobberies of caste and race, how free from the hypocrisies of a mythical superiority?

THE REDEMPTION OF A COMMONPLACE

He is not far from each one of us. ACTS 17:27

Lake and Cadbury comment on this verse: "The thought is congenial enough to much pagan philosophy and may, like its context, be an echo of actual literature. . . . The suggestion that the phrase was a current philosophical commonplace has much in its favor."¹¹⁸ But to Paul this was no philosophical commonplace. It was a tremendous reality which changed the whole face of life. He redeemed the commonplace; he transformed an innocuous generality into a burning particular truth. On every page, almost in every

paragraph, of his epistles this central faith of the Christian revelation gleams.

Truth gets bedridden and impotent through being taken for granted. It becomes a commonplace; and a commonplace is always powerless. Our chief concern is not what happened to this truth about God's nearness in the philosophy of Greece, but what happens to it continually in the very midst of the Christian church. "Not far from any one of us" — yet how often we go along as though God were the private god of a distant galaxy. How often we act as though there were none but mundane factors in any situation we face. Most of us do not realize the extent to which we share the "secularism" of our contemporaries.

What is true for that particular belief is true for all the foundation faiths of the Christian religion. Here is a truth which is often a mere commonplace: "God created man in his own image." How far away it is from our actual day-by-day thought and treatment of our fellow men. How may that truth be made a living power? Only by treating men as though they were the images of God. An ancient Jewish practice has both suggestiveness and judgment for us. Centuries ago a pious Jew, who sought to avoid all transgressions of the law and custom, would refrain from trampling knowingly on a piece of stray paper, because the sacred name of God might be written on it. We look on that as superstition. But do we take anything like the same care lest we trample on something truly sacred, a man made in the image of God? We do not walk over the bodies of men, women and children. But we are participants in and beneficiaries of a social system that tramples cruelly on the bodies and souls of people.

Another basic truth of our religion and of life itself easily becomes a commonplace: "We are members one of another." We accept that as a sort of axiom. We make no protest when we hear the words read in the pulpit. And then we

devote ourselves to our own private advantage, or that of our particular group or class or race or nation, as though the fact of interdependence and interrelatedness could be safely ignored. That truth needs to be redeemed if the world is to be redeemed from war, from poverty, from unemployment.

Walt Whitman has put both the realistic economic facts of life and the Christian philosophy of brotherhood into his verses:

“ Interlink’d, food-yielding lands!
Land of coal and iron! land of gold! land of cotton, sugar,
rice!
Land of wheat, beef, pork! land of wool and hemp! land
of the apple and the grape!
Land of the pastoral plains, the grassfields of the world!
land of those sweet-air’d interminable plateaus!
Land of ocean shores! land of sierras and peaks!
Inextricable lands! the clutch’d together! ”

We are indeed “ the clutch’d together.” In that fact is either the world’s salvation or its doom.

THE MAN NEXT DOOR TO THE CHURCH

And he [Paul] departed thence, and went into the house of a certain man named Titus Justus, one that worshiped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.

ACTS 18:7

This is one of the many alluring and tantalizing glimpses of individual people we get in Acts and in the Epistles — alluring because they pique our curiosity, tantalizing because they are so brief. It would be fascinating to know more about this man Titus Justus, who lived next door to the synagogue. In

particular, anyone who has ever lived in a parsonage located next door to a church would like to know more about him, and about his wife and family. People who have lived in a parsonage "joined hard" to the church know all the penalties of such location, as well as its conveniences. And here Titus Justus is running true to a later custom, for it is he who pays the bill of courtesy and entertains the visitor to Corinth.

How much the church and the world owe to him! For Paul lodged with him, possibly for the whole year and a half which he spent in Corinth. Of course, there is the other side of the ledger also. Think of having Paul in your house for a year and a half!

Titus Justus might well be the patron saint of that vast company whose lives have been tied to the church. For the physical distance between one's dwelling and the house of worship is of no importance; it is the spiritual distance that counts. Some people go from the home to the church without being conscious of a change of atmosphere. They really live next door to the church, not far in their daily lives from its great reverence, "joined hard" in their living to its divine fellowship.

How far, measured in spiritual and ethical terms, is it from our house to the church?

OFFICIAL BOARD MEMBER CONVERTED!

Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house.

ACTS 18:8

Here is real news — a member of the official board converted! The title translated "ruler of the synagogue" does not imply that Crispus was the head of the synagogue, but rather that

he was one of the prominent men. In present-day Protestant terms, he was a "ruling elder," a "chief deacon," a "leading trustee."

Many a parish today would experience a revolution if certain of its most influential trustees believed in the Lord, measured life by his valuations, called great the things that Jesus called great and small the things he called small. All too often the board of directors of the local church, the trustees or vestry men, have a property complex which inhibits daring devotion to the Christian idea when that idea assumes concrete form; they share all the blind spots of local groups about them.

The conversion of Crispus made a deep impression on Paul, for later he mentions it (I Cor. 1:14). In many instances the conversion of the official board would make a deep impression.

Yet here, for our encouragement, is the record that it happened.

A BRIEF FOR GALLIO

Gallio said, If they are questions about words and names, and your own law, look to it yourselves; I am not minded to be a judge of these matters. And Gallio cared for none of these things.

ACTS 18:15, 17

How many thousand sermons have had Gallio for the villain! He has been hanged, drawn and quartered in the pulpit almost as often as Pontius Pilate or Judas Iscariot. The verdict is unjust, for the attitude of Gallio is not only sensible but admirable --- indeed, entirely justifiable. Gallio had a "true Roman contempt for mere talking."

Much of the world is not interested in words or names. Like Gallio, it cares for none of these things. But it is interested, as Gallio somewhat too loftily proclaimed that he was, in matters of wrong and wicked villainy. If religion can be shown to these modern Gallios as being deeply concerned with righting wrongs and overcoming villainy and securing human welfare, they will look at the church with new interest and respect. But so long as church organizations seem to be chiefly concerned with words and names, so long they will remain uninterested. In other words, when the church makes the program of Jesus her first concern, when she preaches good tidings to the poor, proclaims release to the captives, recovers sight to the blind and sets at liberty those that are bruised, she will have a strong claim on the Gallios.

Not all the Gallios, either of the first or of the twentieth century, are entirely sincere. Immediately after this first Gallio had pronounced his lofty declaration, a lawless attack was made on the ruler of the synagogue whose charges against Paul had been dismissed. This was a matter of wrong, but Gallio did not seem to be greatly concerned about it. There are many who, on the ground that they are devoted to noble deeds, dismiss religion as an affair of words; but they are not among those present when the call for daring deeds is sounded. Gallio's attitude is often a fine excuse for indifference to religion.

But there are also deeply sincere Gallios. Can we blame them if they do not get excited about "words and names"? Can we create a church so deeply concerned about the wrong and wicked villainy rampant in our world that they will feel it is *their* church?

THE MAN WITH PART OF A TRUTH

Apollos, . . . an eloquent man . . . fervent in spirit, . . . knowing only the baptism of John.

ACTS 18:25

Apollos had a firm grasp of a part of the Christian gospel. That part he preached with eloquence and ardor. But his message was only a fraction of a larger whole.

Apollos has large numbers of spiritual children in all ages — those who have part of a truth and, seeking to make that part do the service of the whole, give a distorted presentation of truth. For the man with part of a truth, no matter how sincere he may be, is often more of an obstacle to the whole truth than the man who has no grasp of it at all or is its avowed enemy. The completely ignorant or the hostile man does not possess such power to confuse and mislead as does the man whose truth is a fervent half-portion.

“The teaching of Apollos concerning Jesus,” says Foakes-Jackson, “so far as it went, was accurate. But to all appearance the new Christian movement had escaped his notice, and it was certainly late in reaching Alexandria. Aquila and Priscilla heard him in the synagogue and at once realized the power his message would have if only he understood the true significance of what he was endeavoring to teach.”¹¹⁹

“As far as it went” — these words apply today. The man to whom Christianity is a matter of individual life is accurate — as far as he goes; so is the man to whom Christianity is a movement for social reconstruction. The denominational spirit, in its partisan and contentious forms, owes much to the eloquent Apollos and his kind. The man who stoutly denounces politics in the pulpit, when he is sincere, has part of a great truth. The part of which he is ignorant is that the pulpit whose gospel does not affect political action is sterile.

Paul's words, "Ye are complete in him," were written of persons. They apply to half-truths and quarter-truths as well.

I MUST SEE ROME

I must also see Rome. ACTS 19:21

This great resolution of Paul's was formed, according to Acts, after he had been working for several years on the fringes of the Roman Empire, at various points in its outlying regions, on the circumference. He concluded that he must get to the center, to the source of power.

There is much to indicate that Paul was more attracted to the West than to the East.¹²⁰ Rome in particular had a strong attraction for him. He had been living amid the effects of a great power whose center and cause he had never seen. Now he must touch the center, the cause.

There is a lesson here for the strategy of Christianity in our modern world. The church needs to say, "I must see Rome." It is familiar enough with the effects of the powers that dominate the world in which it lives and works. It has touched closely the fringes of evil. Now it must see Rome, the source of these evils. It must deal increasingly and redeemingly, not with effects or symptoms, but with the sources of evil.

Too long has the church dealt with poverty, with disease, with delinquency, with crime — with symptoms of evil instead of with its source in our present society. That source lies partly in the inequalities of our social system. Dr. A. E. Garvie tells the story of his own discovery of the truth that the church must see Rome in this sense. He writes of his early pastoral experience in Glasgow: "A result of my experience of the appalling physical, economic and social condi-

tions in the slums and mean streets was that I became convinced that philanthropy was not an adequate remedy, but that wide-reaching changes in society, especially in the economic system, were an imperative necessity, that the churches were much to blame for their tame acquiescence in these conditions, through their lack of vision and of courage, and that it was a Christian duty both to expose these conditions and to advocate such measures as would remove them." ¹²¹

One of the most deeply moving books of our generation, Paul De Kruif's *The Fight for Life*, which declares indignantly that the cure of much sickness is blocked by greed and profit making, is really a cry, "We must see Rome." If we are going to meet at all the appalling physical need in this wealthiest country of the globe, we must go behind the diseases themselves and deal with the economic obstacles to their relief.

In the field of education also we must see Rome. Aubrey Williams follows a clear trail: "Free education is another thing that we find ourselves romancing about. . . . Millions of boys and girls are lodged in blind alleys and dead ends with nowhere to turn and no place to go. . . . Why don't these children go to school? For the great bulk of these children there is but one answer; they cannot afford to go to school. They have neither the clothes to wear, nor the food to eat, or . . . they have no means of transportation. . . . It doesn't mean much to millions to say education is free. Education is generally free when your family can afford it or when the government steps in to help the family afford it. . . . These boys want to go to school. They don't know why there is no more money in their parent's pay envelope. It is because the people who own the wealth block every measure that would equalize opportunities in America." ¹²²

It is dangerous business, this of tracing evils to their root causes in injustices, in entrenched privilege. Paul saw Rome;

he also met his death there. It is far safer for a church to stay on the fringes of our money empire, to treat the results of evil with patience and charity and not challenge or attack the evil at its source. But there is no other adequate way to carry on God's holy war against evil.

“YOU ARE HURTING BUSINESS”

Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, . . . said, Sirs, ye know that by this business we have our wealth.

ACTS 19:24-25

In that riot stirred up by the silversmiths of Ephesus against Paul, we find Christianity facing for the first time what in the twentieth century has become its most formidable and significant opponent. The complaint was that Paul's preaching was hurting the silver business of Ephesus, which was tied in closely with the perpetuation of pagan religion. Christianity was violently denounced as the enemy of profits. The effect of this appeal to economic interest, cleverly intertwined with patriotic emotion, was to rouse the crowd against Paul and all Christian teachers.

Every verse of the detailed narrative in Acts 19:23-41 supplies most suggestive parallels to the hue and cry against Christian social action today. The adroit appeal of the silversmith to the craftsmen, “These people are hurting our trade (and, of course, your property),” represents the position of many an American chamber of commerce toward any movement threatening to upset the *status quo*. The real deity of Ephesus, as of New York, Chicago, and a thousand other cities, was money making. A. A. Milne saw the point when he offered this substitute for the British national anthem:

“ O Lord our God arise,
Guard our securities,
Don't let them fall.
Scatter all party hacks
(Save those my party backs),
And make the income tax
Optional.”

During the World War there was a charged electric wire strung along the frontier between Germany and Holland. Anyone attempting to pass that frontier was in danger of death. There is a highly dangerous frontier in our economic world today. When anyone passes from harmless generalities to active opposition to profit based on human exploitation, he crosses that frontier, and the powers have sure ways of exacting the penalties.

But we must carry the battle positively into the camp of those who set profits above persons. If profit-makers shout at a vigorous Christianity, “You are hurting business,” let the church maintain: “*You* are hurting *my* business. My business is the welfare of the sons and daughters of Almighty God. The church was put into that business by Jesus Christ. We cannot withdraw from it without betrayal of him.”

LIVING BY SLOGANS

Great is Diana of the Ephesians. ACTS 19:28
The more part knew not wherefore they came to-
gether. ACTS 19:32

Theirs not to reason why. Theirs but to yell their heads off. In all this riot at Ephesus there is no thought, except on the part of the town clerk and the apostle Paul. Merely a two-

hour noise. The crowd had been given a slogan. Their sole activity was in the neck and below the neck.

Slogans are a dangerous substitute for thought. They rouse the emotions while they paralyze the higher brain centers. A disturbing thing about the modern world is that increasingly it is living on slogans. Hitler, who shouts instead of thinking, is a portent and symbol of our time.

It is almost possible for a person to pass from the cradle to the grave with no mental diet but prepared slogans. He can learn by rote the mottoes of his class or group, and go on repeating them with no more intellectual effort than is involved in snoring. In many a company these days the conversation is like that in a store dealing exclusively in parrots. The incantation is not "Polly wants a cracker," but it has much the same mental depth. Over and over the slogans resound, "Reduce taxes," "Down with the reds," "Balance the budget," "Stop spending for relief" — perfect parallels to "Great is Diana."

"In mind be men."

MONUMENT TO A TOWN CLERK

For indeed, we are in danger to be accused concerning this day's riot, there being no cause for it, and as touching it, we shall not be able to give account of this concourse.

ACTS 19:40

With so many statues encumbering the earth which ought to be pulled down in the cause of art, it may be presumptuous to propose the erection of another one. Yet doubtless there are some who would willingly subscribe to a fund to erect a monument to the town clerk of Ephesus. For the more closely he is studied, the more clearly he stands out as one of the fine minds of history. He is a man in ten thousand — one able

to do clear thinking in the midst of uproar and riot. He did his thinking not the day after the victims were lynched, not after he and the rioters had had a week to cool off. He did not need to cool off, for he never got heated up. He put out the emotional conflagration with a bucket of common sense.

The Ephesian Silver Manufacturers' Association, by the use of a technique which some manufacturers' associations have not at all forgotten, had succeeded in rousing the rabble against Paul and his companions. Paul was on the point of being lynched. Then the town clerk turned a real mind on the situation. He had a keen eye, a clear head, and a courageous spirit, a beautiful trinity of attributes. We can almost hear his quiet, controlled voice through the printed words. He told the rioters that there was no need to shout platitudes till their throats were hoarse. "Everyone knows that this is Ephesus, the city of Diana. No one is denying it. The only question at issue is one of evidence. Are these men robbers of temples and blasphemers? There is not the slightest evidence that either charge is true. The place to settle this whole thing is the courts."

Suppose on some of America's great industrial battlefields there had been an official of this sort. Suppose that during a strike in some steel town there had been an official thrice-gifted, as was this town clerk, with eye, head and heart, who, instead of forming a specious "law and order league" as an instrument to be used in crushing the strike, had raised a calm and powerful voice, suggesting the legal institutions of the state for the settlement and demanding their use. Suppose the churches had always attained the moral stature and courage of the Ephesus town clerk, and instead of allowing themselves, as they often have, to be stampeded by hysteria and their supposed economic interest into becoming tools for the owners, had stood up for justice. How much less bloodshed there would have been!

The town clerk went even farther in his insight. He

pointed out that the merchants, in their false accusations and their use of violence, were the real inciters to riot. If bloody revolution comes today, its real fomenters will be the violators of civil liberty, those with the power of property in their hands, in so far as their actions persuade people that there will be no chance for justice under the forms of law and democratic government. The most dangerous "reds" in our country are not men like Earl Browder; they are men of another sort — strong-arm holders of economic privilege and power who seek by violent means to perpetuate that power and arbitrarily take over civic power for their own interests. The wisdom of the town clerk is urgently needed today.

ASLEEP IN CHURCH

And there sat a certain young man named Eutychus, borne down with deep sleep, and as Paul discoursed yet longer, . . . he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. ACTS 20:9

Eutychus revived and left a large progeny, who continue the family trait of going to sleep in church. The church has never taken this accident seriously enough. It has been regarded as a joke on Eutychus — or a joke on Paul whose sermons put people to sleep. (Paul's composure might seem to indicate that this young man was not the first on whom a deep sleep fell while Paul was talking!) But the story presents a challenge to the preacher.

In the little series of books on the future of various fields of human activity, published a few years ago, the book on the future of preaching bore the title *Eutychus*. Is the future of preaching pictured in the man who goes to sleep?

We may well regard Eutychus as a representative of the

many who are overcome by a lack of vivid interest in sermons. He is the onlooker, the outsider, who, if he is to be kept awake in any sense, must be gripped. The preacher must ask, Where in this discourse is anything that comes close to Eutychus, anything that is of momentous importance to him? For there is a Eutychus in every congregation. Christopher Morley, in some verses entitled "Tedium Laudamus," has stated the case from Eutychus' point of view:

" Even in church where tedium is prolific,
I hail thee first, Episcopalian bore.
Who else can serve a social soporific
And, without snoring, teach the rest to snore? "

It is easy for the preacher to call these verses a cruel libel. They might be, were it not that they were written in playfulness. But can any preacher dismiss them so easily? After all, Eutychus is a member of the human race. If he yawns and says "So what?" after our sermon — have we any answer?

AN EARLY DISCIPLE

*And there went with us also certain of the disciples
from Caesarea, bringing with them one Mnason of
Cyprus, an early disciple.* ACTS 21:16

What a title of honor — "an early disciple"! How far back his discipleship ran we can only conjecture. At any rate, the phrase brings to mind afresh how much the church and the world owe to the earliest disciples.

That designation could come to only one generation in all history. But there is a sense in which it is an accolade that may legitimately and proudly be worn in any generation —

by all ethical and spiritual pioneers who accept and act on new insights and revelations at an early stage, before they become popular and common. These are "early disciples" to whom the world is always deeply in debt.

There was a vast difference between the first company of disciples who confronted the world alone, when their message was unknown and their numbers insignificant, and those of even a generation later, when there was a supporting fellowship in a church and the movement had begun to gather strength. There is a vast difference between those who contend for a newly discovered truth or a new stirring of Christian conscience which impels action in a "dangerous" field, and those who accept the results of these pioneer endeavors after they have been established. It is easy enough to "get on the band wagon."

A football referee was once asked concerning a certain player in a game which he had refereed. "I can only say this," he answered, "I have never had to pull him out from the bottom of a scrimmage. I have often found him on the top of a pile of players, where he had jumped on after the man with the ball had been stopped by another player. He was never the first to make the tackle." There are a good many players of that sort. It is a safe game to play. One is not nearly as likely to get hurt if he waits till the ball is "down." So we have many who valiantly come out for positions which have become quite safe and popular, or denounce evils which have no longer any powerful friends.

These latter days have great need of "early disciples" who take risks when the battle is still in doubt.

THE WORD THAT STOPS OUR EARS

They gave him audience unto this word.

ACTS 22:22

The word which automatically stopped the ears of Paul's Jewish audience was "Gentiles." That word was too much. It put an end to both hearing and thinking. Their ears closed up, as automatically as the shutter on an automobile radiator closes when a certain temperature is reached.

The word "Gentiles" has no such effect today. But we have other words which cause the same paralysis of mind and hearing, for most of us have some prejudice, some cherished aversion, some forbidden subject which, when touched, acts as an immediate stop to reason. With many today "Jew" and "Negro" are such words. When they are pronounced in the effort to substitute reason for tradition or prejudice, there is a rush of blood to the head, the doors of the ears bang shut and the mind is darkened. With others "socialist" and "communist" are such words. Mere mention of them has been enough to produce violent brain storms. This is a matter not so much of political difference as of pathological mental unbalance. Many will listen to a discussion of public questions, giving audience unto this word — "C.I.O." Then, as with these Jews of old, their ears cease working and they begin to howl.

If this kind of attitude were just an interesting bit of psychology or a kink in the mind it would not be of vast importance. Its tragic importance comes from the fact that it is one of the most tremendous obstacles to all social progress, and to the kingdom of God. Reread this twenty-second chapter of Acts and see what this stopping of the ears at a particular word brings about. It creates a blind mob spirit which sub-

stitutes violence for reason, or a granite-like imperviousness to any new truth.

To all of us there comes an old question, " Lovest thou me more than these? " — more than these beloved hatreds of yours, more than your pet aversions, more than your fixed ideas?

FROM JERUSALEM TO ROME

And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, for as thou hast testified concerning me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

ACTS 23:11

These words might be the title for the last third of the Book of Acts. Beginning with the sixteenth chapter, the central theme is Paul's progress westward toward Rome. The first half of Acts is oriented to Jerusalem. The narrative is Jewish in character. One commentator on Acts, Dr. Charles C. Torrey, senses this Jewish character so strongly that it forms part of his argument that the author of Acts used an Aramaic source for the first fifteen chapters. In this latter third of the book attention is focused much more on Paul. He is no longer one among many apostles. He becomes the greatest leader and missionary.

There are evidences that Paul eagerly welcomed the facing toward Rome, rather than toward Jerusalem. But his re-orientation was more than merely geographical. In Jerusalem, the primary questions and contentions were religious, ceremonial and theological; in Rome, the chief battlefields were religious not only in the theological sense, but also in the political and social. As Paul had borne witness in the field of religion and theology, so he must now bear witness to

the gospel of Christ in the center of political and economic power.

The great pertinence of this movement from Jerusalem to Rome, into new areas of interest and conflict, to our modern task in evangelization is obvious. Multitudes of Christians and churches have borne witness at Jerusalem. That is, in the theological field they have made a clear and vigorous witness to the faith once delivered to the saints; they have confessed before men that Christ is the Son of God. But they have failed to witness also at Rome. In the centers of economic and political power they have not witnessed so uncompromisingly to another king, one Jesus, whose right it is to rule this world and to bring justice instead of exploitation, brotherhood instead of race and class conflict, love instead of greed, peace instead of war.

Let no one minimize the importance of the witness at Jerusalem. Unless Paul had grasped and affirmed the theological, the metaphysical and cosmic significance of the gospel of Christ, he would have had little or nothing worth taking to Rome. Unless he had realized Christ as the wisdom and power of God, he would have had nothing to bring to Rome except a few moral admonitions, worse than futile. But having a gospel, he was called to carry it into every area of life.

That is our calling. It is not enough to be religiously orthodox; we must be Christian ethically. As Jane Addams put it once: "Ethical teachings have made their premises acceptable to society. What we desire from the church is a knowledge of what to do with these new truths, some certain fashion of connecting our conduct with our consciences." ¹²³

One of the most terrible things in church history has been the failure of the religiously orthodox to bring the implications of their faith into the areas of economic power. Take the heartbreaking history of child labor in England. In 1883, for instance, the British Parliament passed the Factory Act,

the first measure affecting children to be enforced. But it had taken twenty-five years to secure for the mill children a maximum working week of sixty-nine hours! And yet those twenty-five years were years of feverish interest in theology and controversy over religious truth. Witness at Jerusalem, but not at Rome.

WILLING TO GO ON THE STAND

And Paul called to one of the centurions, and said, Bring this young man to the chief captain; for he hath something to tell him. So he took him and brought him to the chief captain. ACTS 23:17-18

This brief glimpse of Paul's nephew is very impressive. This young man had heard of a plot against Paul's life. He was willing to go on the witness stand and tell about it. He was undaunted by the risks of retaliation, which were great and real. In spite of that risk, he was willing to do his part that murder most foul might be prevented. Paul's life was saved by this young man's willingness to stand up and tell what he knew.

Such willingness to go on the stand, to appear personally in a cause that needs help, is unfortunately so rare that this nephew of Paul's is a man in ten thousand. Criminal prosecutions against robbers and racketeers of all sorts fall to the ground from the difficulty, often insuperable, of getting people to testify against them in a law court. They have the evidence which can convict the criminals, but they shrink from the consequences of giving it publicly. They are perfectly willing to confide their story to the district attorney in the secrecy of his office. But to face the fierce white light which

beats about the witness stand is too much for them. "Oh no," they say, "don't bring me personally into this. I can't afford to get involved." Another type of hero who insists on being kept anonymous is the person who brings a story to a newspaper editor and asks the editor to put it out, while he himself is unwilling to sign and back it. It is like saying, "Here's a stone. It ought to be thrown. You do it."

Paul might well be proud of his nephew. For he had stern stuff in him, the personal qualities on which any real moral and spiritual progress depends. We have in civic and church life many organizations of the "Sons of This" and the "Sons of That." How about having an International Order of the Nephews of Paul?

WHEN FELIX "COMMUNED" WITH PAUL

He [Felix] hoped withal that money would be given him of Paul; wherefore he sent for him the oftener and communed with him. ACTS 24:26

There is a strong irony in the use of this word "communed" to describe the conversations of Felix with his prisoner Paul. What possible "communion" could there be between two such ill-assorted minds? Felix, a princeling with his eyes on a possible bribe, fishing around for the mention of money, yet face to face with one of the greatest minds and personalities of all time! What a meager, thin intercourse it was which is described by that great word "communed." No one can commune with another unless both have something in common. But Felix had nothing in common with Paul.

Probably Felix never even dimly guessed what he had missed. He missed the bribe, and that is probably all he

knew or cared about. Yet right in his hands was one of the great opportunities of all history. Think of sitting down with Paul for one hour, two hours, three hours, looking squarely into his eyes, looking out at life, and at the world, and at God, through his eyes!

We all lightly agree that Felix missed a chance. But let us look carefully at that word "communed." What do we make of our opportunities for communion with great-souled friends? Does not the hour which might have been a real meeting of souls often fizzle out into trivialities through our hurry or preoccupation or, possibly, our concern with our own advantage? The possibilities of communion, the quickening, the fortification of spirit, the stirring of our best — these are often missed.

Go farther. We, too, have our chance of communing with the apostle Paul — in some respects an ampler opportunity than Felix had. We do not sit in his physical presence. But we have a body of self-revelation in his letters, surpassing in quality and depth the communication of soul left by any other man who ever wrote. We too might commune with Paul, catch the warmth of his spirit, plumb the deep things of God with his mind. But all that many of us have is a foggy recollection of a few of his words, an occasional reading of a few paragraphs of one of his letters. We do not commune with him; we merely brush against him.

Farther still. We speak of "communion with Christ," "communion with God." How much of what those great words might mean do they actually denote?

WITNESS TO THE PAST AND FUTURE

For to this end have I appeared unto thee, to appoint thee a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee.

ACTS 26:16

This is the full and true ordination to Christian discipleship, to be a witness to the revelations of God, both those made in the past and those to come in the future. We accept the first. We neglect or shrink from the second. For that reason many of us are really only half-ordained.

Christians rather generally agree to consider themselves witnesses of the revelations of God in past days. They accept "the things most surely believed." To the grace of God in the person and teaching of Jesus, to the great realities of the faith which lie in the past, they bear confident testimony. It is a witness of supreme importance, never to be underestimated. Yet a complete ministry is also a witness to the future, to the new light that is still to break out of God's Word, to new disclosures of God's purpose, to new insights into the meaning of Jesus.

One reason we witness to the revelations of the past so much more readily than to "the things wherein I will appear unto thee" is that, as a rule, the past is much safer territory. Yesterday is not such dangerous ground as today and tomorrow. The past is not the part of the battlefield where the most dangerous missiles are flying. For instance, we witness to the wickedness of human slavery, which by the providence of God has been outlawed from large parts of the earth. But we ought also to witness to the coming of the day of the Lord which will do away with less obvious forms of slavery — exploitation of every sort, peonage, the holding of life in chains through wages below the level of decent living. We do not

witness to the coming of that day when we blandly announce that it will be here in God's good time. We witness to it only when our lives, our thinking, our attitudes and actions show forth clearly the kind of human relations which the Christian gospel implies, when our temper and qualities become the means by which that will of God will find expression.

Again, we give hearty witness to the past in that we accept the domination of the Christian spirit in family life, the one realm of life which has been most strikingly christianized. But we must also witness to the future dominance of Christ in the much more unsubdued areas of citizenship, of business life, of race and national relations. That is the much more difficult part of our commission.

There is a phrase we frequently use, almost a technical phrase — "a woman of easy virtue." We use it of promiscuous sexual conduct. But the words taken literally might have another meaning. "A man of easy virtue" might mean a man who practices the virtues which are easy to be practiced. Doubtless we should not say of any virtue that it is easy. But the virtues of strictly individual personal conduct, which find expression in face-to-face relationships with people, are more easy to practice than those necessary to the relationships of larger groups, if they are to be at all Christian. One reason is that the personal virtues are simpler, more direct, not set in such a tangled and complex frame. In our modern world, kindness is a much simpler virtue to practice than justice. Indeed, in the kind of interrelated world we live in, we are tempted to throw up our hands at the attempt even to approximate justice. It is the harder virtue. Yet it is the virtue that looks toward the future. It involves hard thinking, willingness to work for a world in which our own privileges may be considerably less, willingness to overcome the antipathies and prejudices of the class in which we are

placed. Yet if we are to be Christians, we must be persons of "hard virtue" as well as of "easy virtue."

The sense of a greater future finds beautiful expression in the words which Alfred Noyes puts into the mouth of Tycho Brahe in his farewell to Kepler:

"Take thou the splendor, carry it out of sight,
Into the great new age I must not know,
Into the great new realm I must not tread."

THE CHRISTIAN CREDENTIAL — MADNESS

Paul, thou art mad. ACTS 26:24

This charge of Festus puts clearly what can never be dropped out of Christian faith if it is to be still a living thing — a certain irrationality, a venturesome thrust of mind and life, which goes far beyond the prudences, the cozy axioms, the arithmetic and logic of a world of Festuses. This charge of Festus is one of those high tributes paid to Christianity by men who imagined they were condemning it. The most incisive and penetrating tributes to Christianity have been paid by enemies or nonadherents. It is almost as though there were some infallible instinct at work in singling out as marks of shame those very traits which are Christianity's enduring glory. This judgment on Paul, for instance, is that of a politician and man of the world, pronounced on a faith pitched high above common sense, on a recklessness and passion which betrayed a man "possessed." Some sort of unknown X quantity was at work; consequently, in Festus' judgment, Paul was mad.

It is a tribute devoutly to be coveted. When the Christian faith and purpose cease being something mad, something above the world's probabilities and proofs, above its shrewd

prudences and readily obtainable ends, it ceases being Christian and becomes just another dull passage in the annals of pedestrian common sense.

To say this is not to be unmindful of our tremendous debt to those who have made clear the deep reasonableness of the Christian faith. Yet the Christian religion never strikes its most compelling notes, never gets into the treble clef, until it frankly admits the charge that it is tinged with irrationality. That is, it trusts in realities and insights which it believes to be true but which can never be completely proved by the world's logic. It sets out on roads that are never completely seen. Faith in love as the ultimate power in the universe must ever run beyond, must ever rise above any rational underpinning. It must have a touch of madness.

Hence the Christian goal must not be confused, as it so frequently is, with some immediate social or political objective. To make such a premature identification of the Kingdom is to show a distressing lack of imagination in picturing the profound changes which a Christian state of society would imply. Here is an eloquent word in the report of the *Laymen's Missionary Inquiry*: "We feel that the Christian view of life has a magnificence and glory of which its interpreters for the most part give little hint."

"Magnificence and glory" — both these words are more than a little touched with madness.

THE LAST POINT OF A GOOD SPEECH

Thou wouldst fain make me a Christian.

ACTS 26:28

These words of Agrippa's are the finest tribute which could be paid to a speech. They express amazement at the audacity

of Paul in putting an appeal for decision to his hearer. It was the last thing on earth that Agrippa expected. He was sitting as a judge. He was all prepared to weigh and balance the various elements of evidence. It was to be a judicial, intellectual affair. And all of a sudden he is hit right in the face with a plea for a personal decision. No wonder Agrippa exclaims, "Why, you are trying to make a Christian out of me!"

The interpretation put upon these words by the popular Sunday school song is quite in error. The burden of that song with its rather mournful chords was that Agrippa was almost but not quite persuaded. The translation in the Authorized Version makes such an interpretation quite natural. For it reads, "Almost persuadest thou me to be a Christian." The song has a tragic note:

" Almost persuaded, now to believe;
Almost persuaded, Christ to receive; . . .
Almost but lost! "

There is no question about the validity of the moral of the song, or of the thousands of sermons based on this conception of Agrippa's words. The warning against the futility of half-persuasions is always in season. However, such a theme has no real connection with Agrippa on this occasion. The point of his exclamation looks in another direction. It expresses his amazement that Paul should try to convert *him*.

A recent writer, Neil Borden, has outlined the points of a speech not as they are made in the mind of the speaker, but as they unroll in the mind of a hearer. He says the first point in every speech as the audience hears it is "Ho hum."¹²⁴ That is, the audience begins with an attitude of aloofness or indifference. Every speaker had better remember these words "ho hum" as he speaks his opening words. He must convert indifference into interest. But often, at the end, the

attitude of "ho hum" still prevails. There has been no arousing out of lethargy. The speaker — frequently he is the preacher — gives the impression of saying, "Well, that's that, folks. You can take it or leave it. It doesn't make much difference to me."

Paul was not content with an exposition, a historical excursion, a Ph.D. thesis in miniature. He had an instinct for the quarry. The landing place of his whole oratorical flight was the word "thou." "Believest thou the prophets? I know thou believest." It is the magic word for a preacher, "thou" — "you." The last point of a Christian sermon is always *you*.

Let Emerson have the last word here. In February 1833 he wrote in his journal: "When I address a large assembly, as last Wednesday, I am always apprised what an opportunity is there; not for reading to them, as I do, miscellanies, but for painting in fire my thought, and, being agitated, to agitate."

THERE IS MONEY TO BE MADE!

Paul said unto them, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the lading and the ship, but also of our lives. But the centurion gave more heed to the master and the owner of the ship than to those things that were spoken by Paul.

ACTS 27:10-11

Why did the owner persist in making the voyage in spite of the evidence of unfavorable conditions? Because there was money to be made.

Paul might have used this experience of his as an illustration of his statement, "The love of money is the root of all evil." The love of money has been the cause of many ship-

wrecks. It has sent men out to die in unseaworthy vessels, has sunk ships — and perhaps crew and passengers — for the sake of insurance, has rendered ships unsafe through overworked and underpaid crews.

Paul was here face to face with the lust for profit. There was money to be made. Against that colossal fact, what did a few lives matter? Lives are things to be gambled with. True, it was the end of September or the beginning of October. The sea at that time was no longer considered safe for navigation. But what of that? Up anchor! There is money to be made!

Samuel Butler, the novelist, coined a striking and sinister phrase, "The Fortieth Article." He contrasted the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion with the "Fortieth Article" — the power of money. There are multitudes of people, including churchmen, who may be a bit heretical on some of the Thirty-nine Articles; they are soundly orthodox on the fortieth.

St. Paul, standing on the deck of the little ship, pleading for human life against the lust for profit, is an eternal symbol of the true role of the church of Christ in the world.

HOPES AND CHAINS

Because of the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

ACTS 28:20

Real hopes always have chains attached to them. Hopes are wings, we are told. We have all seen great hopes act as wings to life, giving lift and buoyancy to hard days and long years. All true. Yet a cherished hope binds one as by a chain to obligations implicit in the hope itself. Of course, when a person says, "I hope it will not rain tomorrow" or "I hope I will have good luck," he is using the word in its colloquial

sense, as a synonym of desire or wish. But hope in its religious sense is far deeper than that. Such hope is composed of trust and reliance; it is the ground or source of happy expectation.

It was in that deep sense that Paul had hope of Israel. Because that hope in the God of Israel, revealed in Jesus Christ, sang within him, he willingly wore chains. The iron chains on his body were only the symbols of a deeper and stronger chain. He was the slave of Jesus Christ. "The love of God constraineth me," he wrote. Because of his hope for men, for Israel, for the world, he bound his life under great obligations, as the servant of all.

Do we hope deeply enough to wear gladly the chains which inevitably accompany great hopes? We hope for peace. Do we wear the chains of that hope? If we truly hope, we are bound to the things that make for peace, to the renunciation of attitudes that bring conflict, to the labor which the creation of a public opinion for peace demands.

We hope for justice. Do we wear the chains of that hope? For it has chains to be worn; chains that will bind us to a just way of life, so far as we can lead a just life in an unjust society; chains that will bind us in a fellowship of struggle with the exploited and defrauded; chains that may well bring us contempt, hatred, perhaps martyrdom.

We hope for the coming of the day when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth like the waters of the sea. Are we bound in the chains of that hope? Do we put our lives under the obligations, the ardors and endurances, which that earnest expectation lays upon all who hold it?

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